

# PREDATORY MARRIAGE

BY J. RUBY KIM

LINE

## **Predatory Marriage (GIP) by jrubykim**

**Category:** Romance

**Genre:** adaption, adult, fanfiction, fantasy, gip, jenliam, jenlisa, jennie, jenniekim, jin, jongin, kimjennie, lalisa, lisa, lisamanoban, mature, nsfw, romance, seokjin, sliceoflife, texttospeech

**Language:** English

**Status:** Completed

**Published:** 2023-05-03

**Updated:** 2023-10-27

**Packaged:** 2023-12-04 22:39:13

**Chapters:** 200

**Words:** 272,511

**Publisher:** www.wattpad.com

**Summary:** [COMPLETED] Princess Jennie wrote a suicide note ahead of her wedding. It was because she was certain that she would die after the wedding night; a miserable end of a princess who devoted her life to the country and to the royal family. But before giving up her life, Jennie planned her last revenge to the family, one that would surely leave them in ruins even after she became a cold corpse. She would bring them shame by being a non-virgin bride. "Why did you throw away your first experience? Don't you just want to run away?" "I... I want to die." Jennie impulsively confided to the man she slept with for one night. ----- note: (Lisa's name will be Liam here since she will be portrayed as "HE" and also to avoid confusions) G!P JenLisa/JenLiam WARNING: Mature scenes! not my book.

**Language:** English

**Read Count:** 112,116

# Volume 1. Chapter 1

## Chapter 1 — Jennie de Estia

Before the wedding, Jennie wrote a suicide note. As words slowly filled the crisp piece of parchment paper, her heart sang a melancholic tune. She was certain that she would die after the first night of her marriage. A bride's suicide would bring disgrace to her family. But a dishonorable, ignominious death was what Jennie wanted the most.

Death.

Is it what she deserved? A miserable end for a royal princess, who devoted her life to the country and to her royal family? Her accomplishments and efforts turned into ashes the day her family sold her like a common good—in exchange for wealth. No matter how hard she tried, at the end of the day, she was only a mere tool for other's convenience.

Oh, but death would be a sweet escape from the life she was to face.

Kim Seokjin, the man betrothed to her, could easily pass as her father. However, despite her exercising a veto, she was left without a choice. The man was insanely powerful that her parents couldn't refuse in giving her hand—or did they even hesitate in the first place?

When the royal family accepted Seokjin's proposal, Jennie vowed to retaliate. To blemish the highest quality good prepared by the royal family which is herself. It was the only revenge Jennie, in her powerless state, could possibly do.

Horses were already saddled up. Today, she would travel towards Seokjin's home where the wedding would be held.

The arrangements have been made without her permission. For the coming days, Jennie pictured out what was going to happen in her head. After a three-week-long carriage journey, she would arrive at Oberde. There, she would exchange vows with an old Seokjin, share

the kiss of oath and...spend night with him.

The face of Kim Seokjin, excited at the thought of having his filthy hands on his new, young bride, was drawn clearly in Jennie's mind. Unpleasant shivers ran up her spine, disgusted to think that he, who looked like a toad, would ride her body. But Jennie already did the irreversible. After their first night, Seokjin will find that his new bride is impure.

The virginity of the bride in Estia was considered most important than anything else. Knowing that a deflowered bride was sold to him, to which he paid a great deal of wealth, Seokjin would be livid and thoroughly insulted.

He was not a man to trifle with. His power extended even to the barbarians on the periphery. Moreover, his fury was enough to strangle the nobles of the capital. Therefore, the royal family, which had already lost all their power and remained only a luxurious shell, would suffer a terrible fate under Seokjin's rage. They would have to vomit out more than they had received from him, just to quell his anger.

And Jennie will be stripped of her royal name and forever be condemned as a prodigy who slandered her royal honor.

It was a perfect ending. The only unfortunate thing was that Jennie would not be able to witness the ruin of the royal family with her own eyes. Because by then, she would already be a cold corpse.

"Princess, these are the wedding papers."

Just before leaving Estia, the court-martial brought in papers Jennie had to sign. Without resistance, she wrote her name, smearing a fine ink on the paper.

*[Jennie de Estia.]*

The lavish signature was the same shape as the one she left on the note she made. The black letters on white paper were as clear as night.

When she put down her pen, Countess Melissa, the maid of honor

watching from the side, burst into tears. As soon as she wept, the other women who were holding back tears began to sob in unison. Even the court-martial who brought the wedding hall also had a disastrous look on his face.

Everyone was grieving for her, but Jennie was calm. She elegantly put down the paper and straightened her back.

"Stop. I must go. There's no time to waste."

"Princess..."

"Jennie!" An urgent voice resounded. Jennie halted in her steps, and slowly looked back to see a man of a foreboding stand, panting as he reached her.

The Crown Prince of Estia, Jongin.

Looking at her half-brother with the dazzling silver hair, Jennie smiled serenely. One of the few advantages of this terrible marriage was that it was no longer necessary for her to see Jongin.

Jongin beckoned the servants and guards around Jennie to stop loading Jennie's luggage to the carriage at once. At his arrogant display of authority, Jennie only looked straight at him. The sight of her not avoiding his gaze, like she used to, made Jongin laugh hoarsely.

"Well, well, well. Isn't it the whore who baited a large fish. She seemed to be full of herself now."

It was a remark devoid of any dignity, resembling that of a street vendor. But since she wouldn't have to deal with him anymore, now that she was to leave the palace, Jennie responded without a trace of agitation.

"Please step aside. If I delay any longer, I won't be able to leave the capital by today's end."

This was not the reaction he expected. Her indifference unnerved the prince and he raised his hand with a grimace. Instead of flinching, Jennie gave a cold retort to the man who was about to slap him hard on the cheek.

"I am now the property of the Kim Seokjin. Do you dare to hit his property, brother?"

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## Chapter 2

### Chapter 2 — Princess and the Savages

Jongin's eyes shook with anger. Slowly he lowered his hand and strode close.

"Don't you ever think that this marriage can let you run away from me." A hair breath distance between them, a contemptuous whisper pierced into Jennie's ear as though it was of a snake.

"The day I ascend the throne... I'll be the first one to bring you back here in the capital."

It was a threat, but Jennie felt no fear. Instead, a soft laugh slipped from her lips, which stabbed the prince deep in his gut. She wanted to answer back but realized that exchanging words with a senseless person would be a dire waste of her time. Without a farewell bid, she got on the carriage, completely ignoring him.

When the carriage door was closed, Jongin shouted and pounded against the door with his fists. But Jennie couldn't hear his long-winded curses and insults anymore— she chose not to listen rather. Whatever the prince said, his words were futile—a wooden spear aimed at steel.

The carriage moved and with the turn of its wheels, a tear rolled from Jennie's eyes.? She pulled the curtain slightly apart and looked out of the window. The palace of Estia was rapidly moving away from her sight, from her grasp...

It is a place where she lived her whole life, but she felt no regret or sorrow. Jennie never belonged there from the start.

However, there were lingering feelings that bothered her.

"..."

She bit her lower lip and closed the curtain with a sigh. She didn't know why she kept on thinking of him. a cocky, unruly, inscrutable man.

From what she heard, the brute left the palace a day ago. Ah! She scolded herself internally. It was foolish of her to miss an already broken relationship. But while cursing herself for being stupid, she still couldn't shake off the onslaught of thoughts.

While lost in her musings, the carriage left the capital and reached the outskirts of the capital. Gone were the houses; what greeted them was an open plain full of grass. It was a beautiful scene, but it didn't endear her one bit. Instead, Jennie just lounged down on her seat miserably.

She wished time would pass quickly so that her boring and useless life ends sooner. With nothing else to do, she fluttered her eyes to a close, when suddenly, she felt a shift in the wind. A trumpet sounded amidst the tranquility that reigned. Its ear-splitting sound made Jennie sit straight immediately, her hair standing on end. Following the roar of the first trumpet, horns went off one after another. Her heartbeat ran haywire at the chaotic noises that spread over the once peaceful plains.

Jennie drew the curtains and looked out of the window. With the sight that greeted her, she swallowed hard. Dozens of men on horseback were trailing towards their direction. The royal knights guarding her carriage shouted hurriedly.

"It's an ambush!"

From this point, the carriage began to run rough. But the pursuers' movements were surprisingly agile. They simply caught up with the procession and surrounded the perimeter. The piercing sounds of instruments and shouts mingled in the air. Iron swords unsheathed rang out everywhere.

Out of nowhere, a rope flew which wrapped around the throat of the knight who guarded Jennie from outside of the running carriage. He then pitifully fell out of his horse, his head hitting the ground grotesquely.

Arrows rained down, cutting the wind in succession. Frantic horses kicked and went wild.

As she looked out the window, she saw the carriage's horseman fell to the ground. Jennie closed her eyes tightly. The carriage, with only the horse dragging it, terribly shook. In no time, her whole world turned upside down.



"...."

She gasped. The carriage was horribly overturned, its wheels broke, its door torn open. Aside from the scratches that marred her skin, it was fortunate that she survived the accident unscathed. Only, she felt dizzy, and when she finally came to her senses, Jennie pushed the broken carriage door out of her way.

Crawling out of the wrecked vehicle, she met the cold wind which already smelled of blood. Her head was tingled as she looked around. Royal knights were battling their pursuers on a pool of blood. But it was a meaningless battle. The royal knights were swept away in vain as if they were only nothing. One knight roared in a bloody voice.

"How dare you, savages- "

He was unable to speak to the end. A sharp curved blade penetrated his neck. From his throat, blood streamed to the grass. At the horrible sight, Jennie covered her mouth with her hands, suppressing a shout.

The images of the raiders were embedded in her vision. High-chromatic eyes, dark hairs, and tattoos on tanned skin.

The men who attacked the royal procession were savages, the Kurkans.

Among the beastly men, a prominent figure emerged. The tall man riding a giant horse drove up to Jennie.

Under the disheveled dark brown hair, a hot golden eye pierced Jennie. The moment their gazes met, Jennie felt the air snatched from her. Breathlessly, she opened her lips.

"Why..."

Her whisper, barely uttered in a split voice, was quickly drowned by the man's laughter.

"Don't you remember?"

Stretching his hand, he fetched Jennie from the ground and maneuvered her to be atop his horse, fronting him. In resistance,

Jennie twisted her body but was simply overpowered by the man's strength. A large hand clasped her waist firmly, that she could only wriggle to no effect.

With a smirk, the man behind her mumbled against the top of her head. His words sending shivers up her spine.

"I told you, I will ruin your life."

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## Chapter 3

### Chapter 3 — At a Shabby Inn

The wedding of Jennie and Seokjin of Oberde was arranged. To her frustration, her opinion was not heard, it being given no importance in this political marriage. She received the news without any prior discussion.

Isn't Kim Seokjin a faithful hero of Estia? The best expression of gratitude from the royal family is you, indeed!

I told you that your body belongs to the royal family.

This is a duty a royal princess must bear.

This is for the sake of Estia.

Words that were supposed to comfort her further fueled her ire. To tie her to her duties, people start whispering to her ears, gauging her to submit to the royal decree. Kim Seokjin won't want a hesitant wife, after all!

Upon finding out that her existence was only for the sole purpose of gearing up a beneficial treaty, she felt despair. And as soon as the immeasurable sorrow left her, anger took its stead.

As her gaze raked over the official document notifying her of her union with Kim Seokjin, she had made up her mind. She decided to leave a long-lasting disgrace to the royal family of Estia, even if it meant an untimely death for her.

As she refused to resign to the fate the royal family painted for her, a wicked plan started to take its course.

Tonight, she would have an overnight company. The royal family would then be accused of giving a deflowered bride to the high and mighty Seokjin.

"....."

For a moment, as her decision took precedence, she held her breath. Her fingertips trembled badly as fear slowly crept in... Her hair stood on ends and legs slightly wobbled.

However, this slip of vulnerability quickly faded; her determination remaining undampened.

The night was young. Jennie bit her lower lip tightly and continued to grace the street shrouded in nothing but darkness and obscenity.

Drunk people walked in faltering steps underneath the lit lamps that hung between old buildings. Giggles sounded as vulgar, filthy jokes delivered in boisterous tones were spoken. Jennie squeezed her cloak tight around her body. After she carefully checked each establishment that she passed by, she finally found her target place—it was a shabby inn which looked like it would collapse anytime soon.

The knob felt cold under her palm as she hesitantly pushed the wooden door open.

The inn was already full of tipsy, intoxicated people.

Naturally, she attracted some attention upon her entrance. But soon, few of those who turned their gazes to Jennie lost interest in her and they continued chattering among themselves.

Before coming here, she already made arrangements. Her company would be seated in the most concealed corner of this establishment, wearing a dark ensemble for the sake of discretion.

Her gaze darted to every nook and cranny of the place and it was not long until a man donning dark cloaks in an inconspicuous corner caught her very attention. He was buried in the shadows, away from the bustle and hustle. At a quick glance, the man seemed to blend in darkness—the shadow and him merging into one body difficult to differentiate.

Jennie slowly started to draw nearer the mysterious man. Upon reaching him, she tapped the table where the man was seated and instantly, the lone hand that held the wine glass froze in mid-air... His hands, wrapped in leather gloves, were so big the glass it held

looked like a mere toy.

"Are you my company tonight?" She asked boldly.

An agonizing second passed. The man's lips only parted before he uttered, "It seems so..."

It was a low and rough voice that seemed to scratch from his inside. Jennie blinked hard.? She heard that men of such pitch are gentle and beautiful.

But his voice that reverberated in her ears was different from what she had imagined. Though suddenly surprised, she soon pulled herself from her musings. Anyway, once things are done right, this will soon be over.

"Follow me." The man directed, to which she subserviently nodded in return. He soon led her to a flight of stairs heading to the second floor of the building.

The wooden stairs creaked with her every step.? After passing through a long hallway, they entered a room at its most end. The man opened the door for her and let her inside first.

Surprisingly, the rented room was the best one in the inn. Heavy draperies and cozy furniture—if anything, it looked romantic and deserving of couples wanting their first night to be memorable. Such a waste though, for this night was never intended for romance. But rather, she came here with a clear agenda.

Entering the room after her, the man closed and bolted the door. Its clicking sound sounded like a death sentence to Jennie.

There is no going back now...

Mustering courage, she turned around and faced the man. As she did so, she drew a sharp intake of breath.

"...!"

A while ago, the man sat in the shadows and slouched low by the time he stood up, making Jennie miss his towering height. Now, facing him in all his glory, an ample height difference between

Jennie and his chin was hard to ignore. Despite the dim light in the room, she could clearly see his broad shoulders and strong physique. She was candidly embarrassed by the stark contrast in their frames. The man must have noticed as his lips slowly twisted to a faint smile. He loosely threw his heavy cloak with one hand, revealing his face.

What welcomed her was a healthy-looking bronze skin, dark brown hair and dull yet fierce eyes.

In the dark, his piercing golden eyes remained clear and bright, reflecting the wildness of a beast.

Though angular, his features were brutally beautiful. Filled by an overwhelming fascination for this man, she unabashedly fixed her curious gaze on him.

Jennie's heart raced. Her throat dried as a realization hit her.

The man was not human.

"...Kurkan?" She muttered unconsciously to herself. Her mouth trembling so slightly as this taboo word was spewed carelessly. Dark skin, huge physique and golden clear eyes with intensely colored pupils were the special characteristics of a Kurkan.

He raised his eyebrows and coolly conceded.

"It has been a long time since a person has called me Kurkan. Nowadays, we are normally called savages." He said, slurring the last word.

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## Chapter 4

### Chapter 4 — Red light District

Kurkans were rarely called by their names. Most continents despised them, perceiving them as barbarians or beasts. This is because their race was known to have inherited the blood of beasts—their nature inhumane and indecorous. They are impulsive, indulgent and instinctive dangerous beings.

But there was one thing humanity envied from them— their physical ability and beauty. What monstrosity that lied underneath their skin could not dim their outstanding appearance bestowed by the Gods.

This disparity gave them popularity. In fact, among slaves, the best class was always Kurkans. Even in Estia, where slavery is illegal, they were secretly traded.

In fact, Princess Jennie herself had seen several Kurkans sold as slaves but this was her first to see a Kurkan with an imposing aura.

Her mind was in a haze, but she was sure of one thing. The man in front of her wasn't fit for sex slavery nor for humor. Rather, with his every cell exuding authority, she could imagine him looking disdainfully from above.

"..."

Her body moved on its instinct. Jennie stepped back, but soon she felt her back touching the wall. A hard, chilly sensation ran down her spine with her sudden entrapment.

The man from the corner watched her with amusement dancing in his eyes. Slowly and leisurely, he crossed the distance between them. He went very close that their bodies touched. Instantly, Jennie felt suffocated, but could only stand rigid in her place. At this moment, she found breathing a rather laborious job.

With one long finger, the man flipped Jennie's cap, from her head. He was a being with supreme senses and there was nothing queer he

could not possibly miss. He frowned at the stiff, cheap brown wig that Jennie was wearing, and tore it off right away. With nothing restraining it now, Jennie's dazzling silver hair softly rolled down her waist with a faint glow.

His golden eyes squinted at her. His skimming, smoldering gaze seemed to be stinging her exposed skin, boring holes to places he set them. Although she was wearing clothes, she felt naked.

Slender nape, collarbone slightly exposed through the tousled clothes, and the small chest that rises and falls while she breathed laboriously, the man studied these all. It was not hard to realize that the lady he cornered was no commoner.

"I can't believe that a lady of your standing visits the red-light district. Is something with the aristocrats shaky, I assume?"

Jennie straightened her tensed shoulder. Instead of refuting, she calmly opened her lips and said what reeled in her mind. "It seems that you do not know my purpose in following you..."

She stared up at him and felt herself die inside. She got the wrong man! But, how would she ever explain to him her mistake by not revealing who she is?

"Purpose?" His lips twisted into a mocking smile, understanding fully her motives.

"What's wrong with that? I was only looking for fun while making sure my identity is hidden."

"...."

He was speechless. It's not every day an aristocrat, with a failed attempt in disguising, graces this kind of place. She is hiding something.

Though he got more questions he wished to be answered, he did not press her any further. On the other hand, his silence made Jennie thoroughly flustered, her heart racing madly against her chest. She knew that at this moment, her face resembled a fat tomato.



In embarrassment, she was forced to lower her eyes. Perhaps, the man was looking for some entertainment tonight which in the current circumstances, was granted. She, who assumed that he was a prostitute, must have piqued his interest. His body language told her he didn't have the heart to let her go any time soon.

Silently, Jennie finally decided on her next course of action. She would never see him again, anyway. If this is one of the prices for ruining the royal family's purity, then the means she had to do must no longer matter.

With trembling hands, she clutched the edge of her skirt. From the start, she was determined to do this even if she knew that she could die. Hence, at this point, there was no reason for her to be scared. As she slowly looked up and caught his searing gaze, she noticed that his golden pupils slightly thinned and her jaw instantly fell. To witness this peculiarity in this proximity was awe-striking. Deeply enthralled, she lost track of the seconds that ticked by, but a deep, throaty chuckle brought her back to her senses.

Jennie then pushed the man's chest inaudibly, trying to make room between them. However, the strength of her frail arms was feeble—the man was hardly moved. Instead, his smirk grew as he watched her struggle.

He is sure enjoying this, she glared at him.  
"Don't act presumptuously. I was only looking for someone to pay and have sex with." She spat out with irritation evident in her voice. In his eyes, she was no modest woman so why would she act like one?

The man only laughed hoarsely at her bluntness. He asked back with great amusement. "So, should I call you master?"

This man sure is cocky. She gritted her teeth and untied the knot of her dress with trembling hands.? She just wanted this to be over. While she tried to remove her clothes, the man whispered in her ears, making her fumbling hands freeze.

"I should be the one to do that."

Before she could protest, large hands lifted her body effortlessly. The

man handled her as if she was only a mere child!

Cradled in his arms, she looked at him, brimming in embarrassment.

"Are you scared?" asked him.

Her answer wasn't heard because as soon as he said so, he tossed her to the bed and climbed sleekly on top of her. The bed creaking underneath his weight. His slender fingers grabbed Jennie's chin and thumb rubbed her plumped lower lip.

"Why did you dare come to this place?"

The voice that resonated in her ears sent small shudders to her body. Yet, his intimidation could not shatter her resolve in keeping the reason of her visit and therefore, her identity, to herself.

"Just do what I told you to do." She raised one brow and feigned courage. "Don't worry. I promise to pay you."

Hearing this, the man whispered in a gentle voice; his eyes shone with mischief. "Open your legs."

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## Chapter 5

### Chapter 5 — Please Forgive Me, Master

Most of her time in the palace, Jennie heard all kinds of vulgar words from her half-brother, Jongin. Yet none of those made her flinch the way she did as the man on top of her spoke so coarsely.

Was it because of his low, deep voice? She felt that his words were cruder and more offensive. Under his scrutiny, she tried to hide her unease while her face burned of embarrassment.

The man staring at Jennie's flushed face smiled and soon retracted his big hands from resting beside her face. He used them to rip off her clothes, making quick tearing sounds resonated around the chamber. Having immense strength, his rough hands weren't delicate enough to unbutton her clothes without causing damage, so he just yanked and pulled it off, succumbing to his primal instincts.

Jennie trembled faintly, like a sheep in the mercy of a beast. A while ago, she spoke fearlessly but couldn't hide the fear that had started to fill her. Fear from doing it for the first time—and with a stranger no less!

Her eyes flew open when a cold chill coursed down her body, biting her skin. She found herself wearing nothing but her undergarments. The man looked at Jennie with pride, amazed by his own piece of work.

In the dark room, there was only a dim light emitting from the table candle and from the moonlight peering through the cracks of the drapes. Yet, it was enough to illuminate her body, and his golden eyes scoured all over it. His stare made her shiver.

Being a princess, her body had been pampered, leaving no traces of even the smallest scar. Her skin was snowy white—as unblemished as her light silver hair.

Jennie thought that the man would immediately babble words of praise. But his face unexpectedly hardened as he uttered words she

was least expecting.

"You're too thin." He carefully grabbed Jennue's wrist and held it gently, like a fig that would easily break in a strong blow of the wind. He muttered, "Do you properly eat?"

How dare... His honesty, which was almost comical, calmed Jennie's frenzied nerves.

She stealthily took a deep breath and then without thinking, pulled the hem of his waistband. Her hands, as if with a life of its own, moved impetuously!

Instantly, his gaze moved from her wrist to the bold hand that was tugging down his trousers. He was surprised by her actions. His eyes found its way back to her delicate face.

"Stop blabbering and just take it off," was the order of a beet-red Jennie

Unlike her, the man only took off his robe and was still dressed. He smirked when she commanded him to remove his clothes and laughed when she tugged down his pants again and failed pitifully.

Jennie didn't know what he found funny, but the man seemed to laugh every time she spoke. Hence, she finally snapped and opened her mouth, finding it aggravating. "Do not speak to me like that."

"Like what?"

"Like... 'Open your legs.'" She said with a grimace.

His vivid golden eyes pierced hers. Nonetheless, Jennie looked at him back straight on, unafraid of his stare.

He slowly craned his neck sideways, his eyes partially drooped. "I am a low-born man with no education. Please forgive me, master," he asked for forgiveness which was noticeably laced with mockery.

He grabbed Jennie's thighs and parted them. Wedging his body in between, he was able to keep them apart that even if she wriggled and coiled her legs, it was too late. His waist had already been lodged between her legs. Not knowing what to do, she grabbed the hem of

his shirt.

He took this as an invitation to undress. "Should I take these off one by one, master?"

As the man stripped off layers of clothing hence revealing his naked torso, Jennie's jaw dropped. With his clothes on, he appeared perfect—dashing and strong. But when he was near naked, the truth was entirely different...

His tightly-knit muscles rippled on his every move. They were as delicate and beautiful as a carefully sculpted Greek statue. But his skin...it was hideous.

Scars of different sizes were inscribed throughout his torso, and the one on his chest looked thick and painful. Nonetheless, these angry scars made him look fiercer.

Fear gripped her heart as her eyes trailed the ridges of the scars that brandished his body. The man grinned at Jennie, who hadn't realized she was staring too long, and was unconsciously embracing her body. She then felt strong hands lift her buttocks and upper body from the bed while her legs were latched around his lean waist.

Astounded by the sudden change in position, she touched the man's thigh for support. As she did so, she felt something hot under the palm of her hand.

Ahh! She immediately took back her hand as if it was scalded. She trembled as the man clucked his tongue and pulled Jennie's wrist, placing it on his shoulder.

Jennie closed her eyes and silently screamed. Though she had no knowledge of a man's body, she knew that he was far from being ordinary. She could not believe the hot leather-like skin she had felt under her palm.

She felt hands cradled the back of her head.

Because of his large physique, their gazes were leveled despite how Jennie's legs were wrapped around him as tight as a koala hangs on a tree. The man silently looked at her for a moment, then slowly stiffened his hands. As he pressed, their faces grew closer, and he stopped when their noses nearly touched.

His golden eyes sparkled, and Jennie's breath hitched. His forehead bumped hers as he whispered, "Let's do it in order."

Before she could say anything, he smashed his lips on hers. The kiss was light and gentle. However, it didn't last long—the kiss that followed was ravenous. His hot tongue probed her lips open and surged inside her mouth.

It was hot and wild. His velvety tongue roughly wandered inside her. When it left her, it found its way in, again and again, leaving her no room to breathe. He sucked her lips and did things she didn't know was possible.

But as he did so, she couldn't ignore the strange sensation that slowly crept up inside her...especially when she felt the unmistakable canine teeth grazing her flesh.

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## Chapter 6

### Chapter 6 — A Long, Restless Night

As their tongues intertwined, his hands slid down her body and wandered about. Unlike the rough kiss, his caresses were surprisingly gentle... almost soothing. Perhaps, because he knew that no matter how sharp-tongued the woman in his arms was, she was still indisputably innocent.

Breaking the kiss, his tongue swept her earlobe while one of his hands started its impish descend. From the hollow of her neck to the sides of her torso and finally cupping her heaving breasts...

Instinctively, Jennie stiffened at the foreign touch and braced her body for what's to come—the man tightly gripped the cloth separating his palm from her nakedness and without hesitation, ripped it off.

In split seconds, Jennie's peaks were exposed. Meeting the cold breeze, cold, pink buds stood upright on her perky mounds. The man's eyes danced over them and soon, much to her bewilderment, he emitted a soft laugh before mumbling, "Cute."

Her small breasts didn't even amount to half of his hands, yet he played them eagerly as if he was rewarded a funny toy. Her skin tightened under his wicked touch... The rosy buds were locked between his fingers—he rubbed them in circles, pinched them even as he pleased so.

Suddenly, his mouth moved to the side of her neck, where her pulse raced and jumped—he tasted and nibbled hungrily. She gasped, her lips parting as she struggled to regain her normal breathing. Nonetheless, the heart that raced against her chest seemed to have escalated its notion. She couldn't help but grab the man's thick and broad shoulders while he touched her to his content. It was not long until her sensitive body had started to react to the several stimulations he was feeding her at once. Her shoulders trembled as strange feelings roused from his generous fondlings. It was somehow similar, yet different, from the feeling of being tickled.

However, she rather felt bothered of the tingling sensation stemming from only one of her mounds—the man had persistently touched her left breast and left the other unattended. An indistinct sound escaped from the depths of her throat as she muttered, "Uh... Why... Only that side..."

"No whining. I'll get to that side in a moment." He muttered in a slight purr. Even in this heated moment, the man never ceased in teasing her—in all certainty, she did not whine!

But what smart retort she was about to hurl died in her throat for he soon started to suck her flesh hard and stopped only until was stained red. It was his mark—staking his claim on her. Tonight, she would be no one else's but his...

The last place his lips reached was her right breast. Her body bent backward as his warm mouth suckled her mound hard. He held his hand firmly on the small of her back so that she couldn't get away. He gently teased her nipples with his soft tongue and gnawed with his canine, causing a slight pain. The scandalous sounds of licking and sucking filled the once quiet chamber.

The lower part of her body began to throb. To conceal it, Jennie had gathered her legs together—or at least, had tried to. Before she could close her parted limbs, the man's hand dug between her thighs and told her sternly, "This must be wide open."

A short moan escaped her lips and Jennie quickly held his tongue. She couldn't believe the sound that had just come out of her. His glowing golden eyes thoroughly stared at her, watching as she slowly became aroused. Overwhelmed with the heightened senses, she hoisted her nails on his shoulders and kept her eyes closed.

However, at the next moment, Jennie's eyes flew wide open. She felt his hand grasped her nether part which was still covered by a thin cloth. Her body resisted, but the man did not have the slightest intention to let her go. Instead, thick fingers caressed her from the outside, causing a responding streak of pleasure zipped down inside her... The world slowed to a crawl as she found herself experiencing a foreign, enticing desire.



"Let's start it lightly for now." Jennie looked at him quizzically, and he answered with something that took her breath away. "Have you tried masturbating?"

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At the question, she felt dizzy for a moment. He is truly a barbarian who doesn't adhere to any culture...!

She managed to swallow the bitter words that nearly passed her lips. Unable to come up with anything to say, she could only shake her head.

"That's a shame. It would be nice to poke this with your little fingers..."

"..."

What a scoundrel! Jennie wanted to make him shut his mouth which spits out nothing but obscenities. Yet, she was incapable of doing so as her mind kept drifting to the fingers that had relentlessly stroked the top of her thin underwear. "We can do it the next time... but for now," He smiled and smacked his lips into her ears. "I'll make you feel good."

The man's voice sank lower than what she could have imagined was possible. He tightened his arms around her. Upon contact, his skin felt firm and hot...The finger that was teasing her covered flesh gradually started to rub hard making delicious friction come alive.

Swooping his head down to hers, his lips captured hers and tongue trusted repeatedly, dancing a sensual rhythm.

From the moment they started, he didn't take his eyes off Jennie. He watched her submit to his touch. And surely, with her senses drowned in pleasure, her underwear had started to become wet. The damp cloth clung to her damp folds, tracing its slit.

Her strained thighs convulsed. The firm heat in her lower region kept fluttering and tingling. Having enough, he swept her drawers aside, revealing to himself the plump nether lips beneath. Then, a hard, foreign object touched her entrance and penetrated it...

His middle finger dug deeper in her wet crevice; deep until his palm was almost flat against her heat. She felt it all—his finger slowly entering her walls and stretching her formidably.

"Ah...!" Jennie was startled and pulled her hips back—a wrong move as the man, disliking her resistance, captured her hips again and stabbed his thick finger deeper instead.

"Ho—hold on..." Her speech turned into a stutter, as he floundered through the narrow interior. Wet sounds of his fingers gliding against her quim was heard, making her cheeks burn.

Soon, his fingers, which had been slipping in and around her red nether lips, started to curl, earning a muffled scream from Jennie. She let out a moan.

"Huh, uh, ah, wait, stop, uh....."

But as he did from the beginning, he did not heed to her at all. Stubbornly, he poked her insides faster and rougher.

Jennie, twisting around, looked at the man and met his golden orbs. A deep crease formed between his straight and thick eyebrows as he noticed a fat tear that rolled down her cheek. He whispered, sweeping the corners of her eyes with his free hand.

"Why are you already crying? We have not yet started." A wave of passion swept over his sunken golden eyes which promised one thing—a long, restless night.

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Thick fingers came in, atrociously making a quick round trip inside her walls.

Her heat, quivering, swallowed the man's fingers in response. As it reached places, the wetter she had become. The sensation that had been creeping from her underbelly started to fill her up like wildfire. Befuddled by the growing pleasure, she pushed him away in a hurry.

Unfortunately, the man was as hard as a rock and didn't budge, even an inch. Straddling him, Jennie wriggled and shook her head. She

hugged the man and scratched his back with her fingernails. But the surging tide of sensation did not fall, and the man didn't waver with his quest.

She seemed to be driven to the edge of the cliff. As his fingers started to rub her in a rhythm, slipping in and out of her throbbing region, fireworks shot out before her very eyes.

"...!"

Jennie opened her eyes wide, her mouth agape. She arched, bending her back.

If possible, her folds became even more drenched. Her gasps of pleasure resonated, followed by an almost unbearable sensation that racked her body.

"Oh, uh, ah..!" She groaned loud. When she came back to her senses, Jennie realized that she was hanging onto the man and shaking. Her knees that she could barely feel lost its strength. She slumped into him, a total mess while her body gave out tremors.

"Ahhh!"

It was the height of her first experience in her entire life. The novel sensation of losing control of her body for a moment made her feel numb.

Watching Jennie sobbed, overwhelmed by the lingering mix of shame and pleasure, the corners of the man's fine lips slightly lifted.

"Didn't that feel good?" He drawled, while his mischievous fingers crawled to tease her clit, hardening at his touch.

As he did so, her sensitive nub soared to attention. She then realized that it was the source of all the throbbing.

"Stop, stop..." she pleaded, but the man did otherwise. He laid Jennie on the bed and made her hit climax one more time. She gripped the sheets so hard that her knuckles turned white.

As a small tongue revealed through her open lips, the man captured

her mouth and sucked it to submission.

Amidst her being torn between climax and the rough kisses, she didn't notice her thin underwear slowly being peeled away. As soon as Jennie realized that it had come off, leaving her open and vulnerable to the man, she collected her legs reflexively, but was once again, spread wide by the man's callous hands.

It was an unsophisticated attitude. She had never been so spread out in front of anyone. And to add to her shame, the man stared blatantly at her vagina.

"What's going on here?" His taunting voice made her red all over again. Unlike others, she was almost hairless underneath. His long fingers massaged the rosy petals. Jennie barely answered with a groan.

"That's the way it is...."

"From birth?"

Nodding her head, the man grabbed her wrist, raising her arm sharply. When he checked her smooth armpit, he moaned briefly, and muttered in a very troubled tone.

"I never thought I'd like it so far."

"...."

Why is he like this? He seemed to want to lick her at all places! His chest's rise and fall became turbulent.

He started taking off his pants.

Oh my God... Jennie's jaw dropped as she looked between the man's legs. She had already guessed it would be big because the man's physique was significant. But that wasn't normal. Without exaggeration, it was thicker than Jennie's forearm. His penis, which had risen as stiff as it touched her navel, had a moist end, and the bulging tendons protruded.

Kurkans inherited the blood of the beast, and his member was no less

than of a beast.

The man laughed as if he knew what Jennie was thinking. He sighed languidly and rubbed his length over Jennie's thigh.

"Are you surprised?" The rubbed area felt hot as if it had been burned.

"But it's because of you. You have to take responsibility and appease him."

Jennie grabbed the blanket, frightened words coming out of her mouth. "No. How am I going to accommodate that?!"

"You should try."

A round head squeezed in through a narrow gap. The pressure was considerable, even though it was only the tip.

Her insides were wet enough but was still tight and cramped. The man breathed painfully, his lips in a tight line.

"You are so tight..."

But unlike his harsh voice, the man's eyes were serene as the calm sea. Unbeknownst to Jennie, his thick member cut itself in half and slowly came in.

He trusted in and only stopped when he saw Jennie's tear-filled face. She was barely breathing, but upon feeling something entered her, she asked him eagerly.

"D—did you put it all in...?"

"You're underestimating me, aren't you?"

The man replied with a mischievous smile. "There's still a long way to go."

And with that, he pushed his length to the root.

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## Chapter 7

### Chapter 7— Wisps of Pleasure

Jennie found herself in a complicated position. She was vexed... What did just happen?

Showing no remorse, even amused by her stupefied, confused face, the man complimented Jennie and licked her cheek. "You swallowed it all up."

At last, his meat had fit inside her. She couldn't believe it. It felt like her stomach was about to explode. At a glance, a part of her belly looked like it was bulging. She breathed rapidly, holding on to the sheets for dear life.

As if to soothe her, the man heeded attention to her exposed mounds. He gently touched her bosoms pinching, pressing, and rolling its hardened tips. Her perk globes felt like silk beneath his fingers. He then slowly took out his member and stiffened for a moment.

"...."

He narrowed his eyes and looked down at the blood-stained spot where their bodies joined. He slightly frowned when he spotted bloodstains on the white cloth, then soon began to move his body again in the familiar rhythm.

It started to feel smoother. His hot meat softly rubbed against her wet inner walls back and forth. The movement slowly repeated until Jennie fully adjusted to it.

She thought she could bear it if the slow pace continued, but his thrusts had started to become demanding... His pace speeding up, his mouth was in a tight line as he controlled his strength and his desire to ravage her like a madman. However, he was aware of how delicate the being in his arms was.

"Does it hurt?" asked him in gritted teeth.

Even with the slight discomfort, Jennie shook her head to the man's

question. His enormous thing in her stomach was overwhelming—she felt stretched out far than what she thought was possible.

Thankfully, the pain slowly subsided... She slowly let go of the sheets she was grabbing, and courageously touched her lower belly.

Her stomach was indeed swelling! She still couldn't believe that he was able to put his enormous length inside her. Applying slight pressure with her fingertips, she felt the outline of his thing poking her rigorously.

And she gasped, her face went blank, and eyes widened.

Silently watching what she was doing, the man gave a brief laugh.

He retracted his thing, which was formerly plunged deeply, but left its head kissing her entrance. It was then that Jennie's frozen face brightened up. She mustered up her courage and asked.

"... Is it over now?"

"No way." And, the brute impaled her once again, "We were only starting."

It was then at this point that Jennie saw his true nature... He started to rapidly screw her insides, making it seem that the fast rhythm he exhibited just a few seconds ago was only a jest.

Slapping sounds of clashing flesh rang around. Jennie, who was on her wit's end, struggled pitifully.

"Ah, ugh...!"

Her eyes flashed white. Every time he struck, her body would bounce, and her eyes would well up tears. It was painful. But, at the same time, she couldn't deny the wisps of pleasure evoking inside her.

It was an inexplicable feeling. Jennie, who was floundering at the burning sensation, wrapped her legs around the man's waist. Thumping the back of his thighs and knees with her heels, she begged.

"Ugh, slowly, a bit slower!"

But somehow, Jennie's begging seemed to have stimulated the man even more. As he let out a deep groan, his arousal faintly shook... Inside her, she felt the deadly weapon swell up.

She could not believe that it had become even bigger than before. Tears that had gathered on the corners of her eyes rolled down her red cheeks. In helplessness, she pushed him away. And the man didn't twice in snatching her hands. In to his nature, he began to nibble and lick her fingers.

"I'm trying to go slower so..."

This man is a liar. Jennie cried while he ravished her. Every time he slammed, he stabs her inside unnaturally deep. Not only that, but his thick lips also suckled her taut rose buds. She could not even moan properly, the height of pleasure overwhelming her.

Is this what a sexual intercourse is? What Jennie imagined was just gentle kisses, soft caresses, and moderately pleasant sense of complacency. But doing it with this man was not moderate at all. She felt as if she were being eaten up alive by a beast.

Her stiffened feet wobbled helplessly in the air. At an inevitable end, a strange sensation began to rise. It felt like her body was going to fall apart, for which she tried to control her, but somehow couldn't.

"Hmm... Ugh, not like this, please slowly...!"

"Don't you like it?"

The man abruptly pulled out his. Suddenly feeling empty, Jennie tightened her legs together. His thing now in full display, she could see its glistening tip—soaked with their fluids mixed. It emitted an erotic scent, which was so strong, it almost gave her a headache.

The man grinned and said, "Then why is it flooding here?"

She wetted her lips and turned her head away from his appalling words. This was because she could no longer look at his raging pet.

Teary-eyed, Jennie cursed him, "Barbarian... animal..."

He gave a low laugh to her tearful mumbling, "You're well aware, I see."



And with that, he clasped Jennie's ankle in both hands. After licking the soles of her foot and her ankle, he shoved his raging sword again.

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## Chapter 8

### Chapter 8 — Eyes of a Beast

The already drenched lady part took in his thing, this time, without any struggle. It wasn't just that. It even sucked it in hungrily, her flesh throbbing endlessly, being stimulated beforehand. She felt ashamed and unfamiliar with her body, acting out of control.

As if it was not yet enough, he skimmed his hands from her calf to her thighs and then grabbed her tight arse.

He pushed as deep as he could, knowing too well that women found utmost pleasure in a particularly deep spot.

"Ahhh... !" Her body quivered in astonishment.

The man lightly slapped her derriere, leaving hand mark as if to scold her.

"Stay still," He treated her like a child. He squinted his eyes as she stared with eyes full of tears. He muttered something in a language she didn't understand. It was the Kurkan's tongue.

Then, he swept away his sweaty hair to the back of his head. He gave a brief warning—touching her flushed white hips and soon gripping it—a sure sign of a beginning.

"Stop looking at me like that."

She didn't understand what he was talking about. However, she was not given a chance to do so as he grabbed her hips—his lean waist tightening as he pounded savagely.

With his rough handlings, Jennie felt that her small body would be torn apart anytime soon.

She turned red in embarrassment, mainly because of her position. Her lower body was in the air—an uncomfortable position where her waist was almost bent with her thighs flushed against his muscled torso. All the while, his thick and long groan rubbed against her tender inner skin.

"Ah! Uhmm... Ahh!"

Suddenly, a guttural sound came to her ears. The beastly man groaned in sheer pleasure as her insides shook and tightened. Blue veins surfaced on his neck as his jaw hardened.

With his immeasurable strength, it had become easy for him to grip her legs and open it wider to gain more access. Jennie screamed frantically.

"Oh! Ahhh! You—you're too fast!"

Contrary to her pleas, the man didn't seem to go slower. For the seconds that followed, neither the two of them said a word—only the squeaking, gasping breaths, crying, and moaning filled the room.

Nestling his head on the hollow of her neck, Jennie bit his shoulder hard and scratched his back with her fingernails. As it became unbearable, her teeth sank on the man's exposed neckline. Soon, both of their eyes met.

"...."

Jennie paused. She felt herself drown in his heated gaze. The eyes that glinted gold was indeed the eyes of a beast.

But she wasn't able to gaze for long. For at the next moment, he kissed her, and Jennie opened her lips without hesitation this time.

The bed underneath them creaked that Jennie thought it would collapse. But even with the bed protesting under his wild thrusts, the man pounded carelessly. His rock-hard chest pressed down on Jennie's body.

"Ugh..."

The man let out a hot moan. His manhood swelled up, and a liquid gushed out. It shot all over her lower part. Abnormal amounts of it filled her, hence it could be seen dripping.

With relief that it was finally over, her exhausted drooped on the bed. Eyes heavily lidded, she took a moment to pacify her chaotic

breath.

She couldn't believe he came inside her.

She was told that if certain special conditions were not met, Kurkans could not become pregnant or could impregnate. Nevertheless, the man who came inside without a word of notice seemed ill-mannered.

However, there would be no point in addressing his rudeness. Jenny blushed and breathed hard without saying anything.

She felt a little better, so she raised her body carefully. The man still had his genitals lodged between her legs. When he pulled back gently, his meat slipped out, creating sticky sounds.

Her body trembled by the sensation of his liquid flowing out. Jennie, who was covering her stomach with her hands, appeared very flustered.

"...?"

Just as she was rejoicing over the fact that it had come to an end, his meat stood in attention again. When her eyes scoured all over it, as if in a rebellion against her, it swelled ferociously, conforming to its size when aroused.

The man grinned.

Seeing this, Jennie ran away quickly. But in reality, it was only her frantically beating heart that had run miles away. It turns out, she was only able to crawl a measly foot away from him. Her hand barely touched the end of the bed as she felt herself dragged back.

"You can never escape from me," He easily snatched Jennie's waist. With her former stance—crawling on all fours, he smiled and said, "Good idea, should we try it from the back?"

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## Chapter 9

### Chapter 9 — I Want to Die

Without thinking twice, he inserted it directly from behind. He slammed so deep that his acorns slapped her plump behind. The incredible amount of shame and, at the same time, pleasure pierced Jennie.

"Ah...!"

Her shaking hands soon grabbed one pillow. And as her neck arched back, her mouth spasmed, her rosebuds tensed up, and her insides shook. She burst into tears—she had just reached her peak upon a simple insertion.

She did not know of such an atrocious manner. Being treated like this but still enjoying, she felt like a wanton woman—embarrassed by the fact that a salacious position was responsible for her release.

Despite her cries of protest, she couldn't stop the sounds that slipped out of her lips in succession.

"E-Enough of this... ug-ugh, ughh!" She pleaded him to continue in the normal, acceptable position. But the liquid—a mix of both her and his were continually dripping down her thighs. Wet smacking sounds filled up the big chamber.

"A-agh, no..."

"I think you like this position better. Huh?"

"Ahh! You barba—... ahh...!"

He shoved his fingers into her open mouth to get it drenched, before using it to squeeze her heaving twin peaks. Jennie felt the moist, thick fingers rub her rosebuds.

Embarrassingly enough, she found such vulgar action very arousing, every time the man pinched her ladies, something would splatter from below and smear the sheets.

The unmistakable heat in her lower belly had fired up, consuming her will to resist.

Without realizing it, she lifted her hips for him, letting her upper body collapse to the bed with her back curved beyond comfort. As she reclined as such, her globes were in the air—a much convenient position for the man behind.

She could not stand it anymore. That last bit of reasoning that she had faintly flew away.

He roared like a beast and fell on her back, biting the soft skin of the nape of her neck.

Hot breaths and kisses rained on her slender neck and shoulders. Bodies covered in sweat were joined. Bare limbs intertwined tightly in the dark...

Large hands grasped Jennie's face to the side, and a thick tongue intruded her mouth.

He rammed deeper and faster. His hands were locked onto her waist as his thrusts became more violent... more powerful. Jennie soon reached another release; her whole body stiffening up at the sensation that left her weak.

After several thrusts, the man finally let out a groan as he, too, finished off.

The hot fluid shot to her insides, and Jennie trembled without a sound. Her tears made her vision cloudy. Tired lids soon fluttered to a close, and before she knew it, she passed out.

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Pain... Everything felt painful.

Jennie's eyes flashed open. As soon as she saw the strange wooden ceiling hovering above her, her heart dropped

Her faltering breath came to her ears—she felt suffocated. Slowly, she turned to her side, and her breath hitched immediately at the sight

that welcomed her. A man was sleeping with his long arms and legs wounded around her form.

The two of them were bare as the day they were born, but Jennie didn't feel cold. Despite the icy air of dawn, the heat coming off the man kept her warm.

Jennie glanced over her body. It seemed that he had washed her while she was unconscious. For a second, she felt thankful. But as soon the memories of last night flooded her mind, she barely swallowed back the vulgar words that came up to her throat.

It was an unbelievable experience. The utterly new sensation had split and pierced her together repeatedly. Throughout the heated evening, he had been nothing but rough and unforgiving to her.

Her cheeks tinged red. Despite his callousness, she had to admit that it was indeed pleasurable...The night was still vivid in her mind. It would be a memory she wouldn't forget until she breathed her last.

She let out a small sigh. Even though she made a stupid mistake of approaching the man, she had still met her goal—she had been deflowered—a damaged good of the royal family.

It would be bright outside soon.? Now, she had to return to the palace immediately. Carefully, she moved the heavy, thick arms on top of her. Doing this task, she forgot to breath... afraid that the man would wake up from his deep slumber.

"!!"

"!!"

Burly arms quickly wrapped around her waist, lips clung onto her ear, and a low, hoarse voice whispered.

".... Where are you going?"

Under heavy lids, sharp golden eyes glowered at Jennie. She pushed his arm away and said, "One night..."

Her voice came out gravelly. It was because of the coquettish screaming last night. Blushing, she belatedly cleared her voice and spoke again with much fervor, "That one-night recreation is over

now."

"Ahh," However, he seemed to have not listened at all. Instead, he eyed Jennie's body, which didn't have even the slightest scar and licked his lips.

"Let's do it one more time."

She opened her mouth in astonishment. Unlike Jennie, who was sore and aching all over, he showed no signs of fatigue. A sharp glint started reflecting in his eyes, which were dim just a moment ago.

Jennie shook her head in disgust as she felt the familiar scorching heat rising in the chamber.

The man let out a deep chuckle. However, he still wrapped his arms around her delicate waist, trapping her for good. Unrelentless, Jennie kicked and wriggled out from his grasp but suddenly stopped upon noticing something.

Her eyes studied his body. Last night, they had a hot exchange in the dark. Hence, she missed this queer detail.

The man's body was clean, devoid of any tattoo.

All Kurkans that Jennie had seen before were tattooed. Whether it was on their face, neck, and forearms, their skin bore large tattoos. This man, whom she recently shared intimacy, was the first Kurkan whose skin was clean of ink...

His golden eyes, domineering physique, and immeasurable strength—she was sure he was a member of the barbaric clan, but she could not understand why he was without a single mark.

The man, who noticed her looking at his body with her brows furrowed, hugged her closer.

"What are you curious about?"

Frowning, she looked up at his face, "You don't have tattoos... Get a little farther so I can see."

With her free arm, she pushed him away, but he remained close to her. To divert her attention, he left a trail of kisses on her cheeks and



nose.

"Let us exchange information, one by one. If you answer my question, I will answer yours."

Before Jennie could agree, he threw out his first question.

"Why did you throw away your first experience overnight with an enemy?"

In the kingdom of Estia, the purity of the bride was paramount. This was an even more vital matter for the nobles as chastity could reflect the honor of the family. Hence, an impure bride could be legally divorced and, in worst cases, killed.

Not to mention Jennie was a royal princess that would soon participate in an essential political marriage. If found impure, her honor would plummet to the ground, and so would her family's.

There were many reasons she took this path. She didn't want to give her purity to some old man 25 years older than her—one she had not met, one who seeks for fresh, younger meat to satiate his needs.

The marriage life awaiting her was no better either.

Just like most wives of powerful nobles like Kim Seokjin, she would live a miserable life in his mundane palace. She would be wasting her youth.

To her, this would be a more painful death.

The royal family sold her like a high-end product, thus, she would rejoice in ruining their reputation. Most of all, she wanted to let go of the troubling and painful life she had.

However, she could tell the man, so Jennie avoided his gaze and just bit her lips.

"....."

Sensing her reluctance, the man didn't ask further. He smiled, laid on his side with one hand cradling his chiseled chin. He looked at Jennie

and said, "Don't you want to run away?"

The thought was promising and genuinely tempting. At the edge of being persuaded, Jennie came to her senses. It sounded like it could solve all her problems, but she knew that it would never happen. She sighed, realizing that if she had let her guard down just a little more, she would have been unraveled by the man.

Truthfully, If she really wanted to, she could easily run away. The royal family had been rotting for a long time, and Jennie had taken responsibility over the majority of the palace's jobs herself. A little help, courage, and luck, she could leave Estia.

However, she didn't want to do that. She didn't want to live her whole life being chased like a criminal. Rather, she desired to leave this world and leave the royal family on their misery. And above all else...

She felt empty.

From the moment she realized she had been completely abandoned by her family, she had lost the will to live. She no longer wanted to live. Her hate was not directed to the royal family alone, but also to herself. She abhorred herself for devoting her life foolishly to the family who treated her awfully.

To retaliate and end her life, this was what Jennie wanted the most. She slowly closed and opened her eyes. The man was silently waiting for her answer.

A one-night stand.

Someone she would never see again.

A conversation free from courtesy, formality and identity.

"I..."

In the spur of the moment, Jennie uttered something she never told anyone.

"I want to die."



## Chapter 10

### Chapter 10 — Let's Meet Again

Her statement was clear. Confidential words spewed out, Jennie tightly zipped her lips to a close.

The man, for the first time, became quiet—astonished as if he suddenly forgot how to speak. Staring to his face, anticipating a reaction, Jennie found herself jolt in shock.

She saw a stir in his golden eyes—his pupils narrowed, and a red color encircled it like a girdle.

She was frightened for a moment, and hairs on her body stood on ends. The man, noticing the fear he was inciting in her, heavily sighed.

He ruffled his hair, wiped his face, and for a moment, covered his eyes.

And when his eerie gaze was revealed again, the menacing look in his eyes had vanished, masked with his usual relaxed countenance.

The man dragged Jennie's small body atop his belly. He gathered her silver hair to one side, and spoke with his lips lightly pressed against her exposed white nape.

"As for my story—the Kurkan who doesn't have tattoos—I'll tell you the next time we meet," A faint smile crept up his lips, his eyes shone with a mischievous glint, "It will be quite fun."

How absurd.? He seemed quite certain that he would meet her again. Knowing the vanity his words, Jennie laughed in silence. The expectant smile he wore would likely crumble at any moment.

He asked again, narrowing the gap between his brows, "Hold on to your life until I finish telling you my story, alright?"

As long as it stayed as an empty, meaningless agreement, she would tolerate it. Jennie nodded nimbly, watching him as he dragged his enormous body up from the bed, letting her head rest on a pillow

instead.

"Let's eat something."

His beautiful back muscles twisted and stretched, so did his angular shoulders, narrow hip and spine. Although his frame was big, she found his back-side rather cute. It looked so tight.

She had been blankly staring at the naked man wandering around when her gaze unconsciously traveled south and met his erect member. In a hurry, she pulled the blanket, covering her body like a cocoon.

She couldn't believe they were so casually talking naked!

An exquisite specimen, he was confident with his skin—overly confident, that is.? This man knows no decency! A shameless behavior of a barbarian.

Despite this, Jennie couldn't take her eyes off him and found herself having a hard time integrating his delectable image to the word "beast."

With a tray on one hand, he peered at Jennie wrapped tightly in the blanket and laughed. Nonetheless, he didn't take the sheet from her. "Cold, huh?"

Instead, he sat close beside her and balanced the tray on his knee. On it laid a stew full of meat and vegetables and a loaf of wheat bread with raisins. The stew was a little lukewarm as it was prepared before she woke up.

Not having much of an appetite, she refused and turned her head away. But the man forced her to hold the spoon and all Jennie could do was to accept the tray of stew and bread, which was now in small pieces—the man tore it beforehand for her.

It was a lovely dish for a shabby inn.

The stew was odorless, and the wheat bread was soft. Although she didn't want to eat, her appetite grew as she popped food into her mouth. After a while, she finally felt full, so she tapped the tray, and the man met her eyes.

Understanding what she wanted, he shook his head. Instead of taking back the tray, he tore off a large piece of bread, dipped it into the stew, and handed it to her.

"Eat more. You're thinner than the winter branches."

Jennie devoured what he had given her, softly chewing the moistened bread. Was it because she was hungry or was it just her feelings clouding her judgment? She wasn't sure why, but the plain stew and wheat bread tasted more delicious than the delicacies of the royal palace.

While she ate heartily, the man took care of her without saying a word. As she chewed, she constantly snuck sideways glances at him as he tore the bread diligently.

The fairly large piece of bread in her hands seemed small in his. Although Jennie was petite and thin compared to women her age, she felt like a little kid when she was with him.

She stole an observant gaze at his bulging forearm. Indisputably, Jennie's forearms combined would barely amount to one of his. Even his thighs were so thick they could pass as a tree stump.

This scrutiny made her remember the passion they shared last night. After all those rigorous activities, he looked far from being weary. No wonder, it's all because of his fit body—and those sculpted muscles rippling as he moves.

What am I thinking?

Quickly, she shook off the thoughts that were rebelliously filling her head. When the man caught her sizing him up, his brows furrowed as he said, "Don't look at me like that."

Askance, she could not figure out what had offended him. Hence, she blinked her eyes at the words that sounded like an admonishment. With a straight face, the man pointed his finger to his lower body—where his length, looking as excited as ever, begged for her attention.

Hence, from then on, Jennie concentrated on eating the food he handed her without sparing him a single glance.

After eating a third of the stew and bread, her stomach had complained—it would burst if stuffed with more food.

As she put down the spoon, the man became disappointed. His face crumpled, questioning why she only ate that little. He was about to protest when Jennie stood and pushed the tray toward him.

It was time to go back to being Estia's princess.

Time was running, and she couldn't afford to be seen in the daylight.

As soon as she set foot on the ground, her lower half stiffened and her legs trembled beneath her. Nonetheless, she dressed casually, as if nothing had happened. She covered her bare body, wrapping layers of clothes around her, concealing her bare skin so well it seemed enclosed by a hard shell.

After flipping over her wig and pinning the hem of her robe, Jennie looked exactly the same as when she first entered the inn.

She looked back at the man. He was still sitting on the bed, watching Jennie with enthralled eyes.

Approaching him, Jennie dropped a gold coin on his lap and said, "I had fun."

The man pouted at the coin, which felt cold against his skin. He calmly picked it up and handed it back.

"It's fine." Then, his eyes crinkled as he smiled generously. "Let's meet again, master."

—

A pre-arranged wagon waited behind the inn. Jennie asked the horseman for help and pretended to be a maid working in the palace.

"Please take me there."

As soon as she hopped into the carriage, she felt exhaustion kicked in. A sound of pain escaped from her lips—her whole body throbbed as if she had been beaten.

To Jennie's horror, the horseman drove the carriage roughly. With a

pale face, she closed her eyes as the old carriage heavily rattled. She was lucky enough to have eaten, though she had been vexed with the man for making her. If she hadn't, she would have been more nauseous at this moment.

She was dropped off at the palace's back door, where the maids entered and gave coins as payment for the horseman. She made sure that the horseman left before she started on her way.

She knew that the palace guards' shift, routes, and stations were tightly in place. But because of this knowledge, she was able to evade them and wander around the palace's high wall connected to a lush forest. As she fumbled and pressed down the wall, it moved inaudibly, revealing a black passage of the palace.

This passage was only one among the many secret passages of the palace of Estia. Nonetheless, these tunnels remained a top-secret kept only known to the royal family. In fact, during the occasional renovations, the workers were chosen strictly—those whose executions were nearing got to work on this passage to keep the secret from spreading.

However, as the years passed, some passages were forgotten, and so was the passage Jennie took.

After a long walk, she skillfully sneaked to her chamber, and thereon, barely managed from collapsing into her soft, plush bed.

She reeked of the familiar smell of the town. Hence, she grabbed a perfume and sprayed it all over her, distinguishing the scent.

Dressed in a thin nightgown, she combed her long hair neatly and tidied up the mattress.

Rather than being spoiled, princesses were expected to be disciplined—Jennie's chamber was neatly organized. She couldn't show any imperfection to the maids who would come to wake her in the morning. With everything perfectly set, Jennie finally rested her head on the pillow.

As she looked through the window, a faint light escaped through the gap of the open drapes. Dawn was breaking in the distant sky and she would soon need to start her morning work. But for now, she needed more sleep. She must replenish her strength.



However, her mind refused to give her peace. She couldn't bring herself to rest—things that happened just a few hours ago would suddenly wreak havoc in her head.

Specifically, the man's image flashed in her thoughts. Now that she was no longer with him, the chilly air bit her skin. His body temperature, which had previously engulfed her, was hot enough to ignore the blankets. Because of his size, she felt that the bed in the inn was small even when they were snuggled close together.

Most of all, his rude, blunt words remained a vivid memory. His words were surprisingly vulgar, but his touch was soft and warm.

He did not treat Jennie as a noblewoman. Because of that, she was able to act without any pretense, even so, act waywardly.

When she thought of what happened, she felt at ease. When one is faithful to one's instincts, like a beast, there was nothing to worry about...

Let's meet again, master.

His words rang in her ears. Could it be that I might actually...see him again?

As she reminisced on the moment she spent with him and the conversations they had, Jennie scornfully laughed. She found it ridiculous, her fishing for some hope that she would once more lay her eyes on him.

Like a mirage in the desert, it was an illusion her whimsical mind had created. Very soon, death would claim her; hence, she must push this budding hope to the back of her mind.

He was a man with a mysterious identity—she did not even know his name. Everything was just a wild dream.

Letting go of the man's memories, she closed her eyes and sought warmth by hugging her soft blankets tightly in the darkness.

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## Chapter 11

### Chapter 14 – Unwelcomed Guests

The kingdom of Estia, located in the Southwest of the continent, was renowned for its culture and art. As a matter of fact, most of the well-known artists in history belong to this vast kingdom.

These great artists loved their homeland so much that they wouldn't hesitate to dedicate their work to their beloved royal family.

Reflecting the essence of the aesthetically beautiful kingdom was its palace, located at its very heart. A pinnacle of art, the castle of Estia didn't disappoint either. According to historians, it was breath-taking—a sight to behold.

It was built with red bricks and gray stone and painted with a special varnish which glittered gracefully under the sun. The beautiful exterior alone was spectacular, but the interior was even more magnificent.

Elegant vertical columns and long corridors lead to dozens of rooms, each of which was embellished with white marble and other colored stones, gold, and gems.

Moreover, the halls were adorned with beautiful masterpieces—sculptures and paintings, made by remarkable artists. Such a shame though, the royal family cared naught for them. They were mere ornaments and didn't deserve any care, and thus, they were damaged with time.

However, everyone knew that unlike the palace's splendid shell, the humans in its core were wretched.

The nobles no longer feared the king—the ruler of Estia was once highly respected and even regarded as powerful as the sun. But now, he would pale in comparison to a small lamp.

Stubborn as he was, the king clung to his meaningless pride and turned a blind eye to reality, even when his sovereign power hit rock

bottom.

The betrothal of the royal princess was a clear indication of the royal family's downfall. Seokjin of Oberde wanted no one but Princess Jennie, and the royal family had quickly sold her off—without any objection and careful consideration.

The military power of Seokjin of Oberde protected the frontier from the Kurkans—a power that should've belonged to the nation's king. To flaunt his wealth and supremacy, he wore purple clothes—something only the royalty could afford and should afford.

The purple dye was a rare and precious commodity in the kingdom—it could only be extracted by crushing thousands of shells of snails living in warm waters.

On top of that, the dye obtained from crushing a thousand of these tiny animals was just enough to stain only a small piece of cloth.

And because Seokjin monopolized the supply of dye, there were times when even the royal family couldn't get their hands on it.

Seokjin's arrogance was criticized by many, but they could only talk behind his back. No one dared to openly defy him.

The powerless king of the royal family couldn't even dream to stop him. In fact, it would've been more logical to call Seokjin a king instead.

"... Princess, shall I call for the new carriage?"

Jennie came back to her senses upon hearing Countess Melissa's voice. The countess's smile softened, gazing at the princess. She knew that Jennie was lost in her thoughts, so she woke her up from her stupor in a courteous manner.

"Thank you, Countess."

Jennie couldn't believe that she got distracted while in the middle of doing her job. She could only blame herself, but she didn't have a choice. It was all because of the message that Cerdina sent through a servant this morning.

*-It's been a long time since we had dinner. I have a gift for you, so come to the Queen's Palace.*

A dinner with Cerdina...

It was Jennie's worse nightmare. She tried to conceal it, but from the moment she'd received the message, she was on edge.

She accidentally bit her tongue. This was not the time to think of such things. Countess Melissa wasn't the only one with her. The minister of finance and the court's count were accompanying her as well. Jennie tried to calm her nerves and concentrate on her work again.

At this moment, she was looking over the work of the officials of the royal palace. Since she was in charge of most of the royal matters, she was assigning tasks and giving instructions about the details to make up for the time that would be lost due to the wedding.

The royal family may have abandoned Jennie, but the people were innocent. She wanted to carry out her responsibilities until the end.

"I'm thinking of reorganizing the tax system one last time before I leave the palace."

Jennie handed out the documents that she'd prepared beforehand. She gave them to Laurent, the minister of finance, who sighed and then passed it to Count Valtein.

Count Valtein's expression immediately turned serious. He murmured, stroking his handsome mustache.

"I think there will be a lot of resistance from Great Britain, especially from Seokjin of Oberde..."

Count Valtein wanted to say more, but caught himself in time. Sharp on her senses, Jennie was able to pick up on his expression. Countess Melissa was glaring at the count as she stood right beside him. For Jennie and her subordinates, Seokjin was nothing short of an enemy.

"Countess."

"My apologies, Princess."

It wasn't until Jennie called her that Countess Melissa stopped throwing daggers at the count. Impassive of the exchange between the two, Jennie fixed a look at Count Valtein as he continued speaking.

"Continue."

Her cool voice did not contain any emotions. Count Valtein carefully continued speaking.

"Seokjin recently used the barbarians as an excuse to ask for a reduction of the taxes being imposed on Oberde."

Jennie furrowed her brows. The biggest reason behind Seokjin's power was the Kurkans; he used them as an excuse to enjoy all kinds of exclusive benefits. Even though he already enjoyed numerous privileges compared to the other rulers, he vigorously kept asking for more.

As Jennie dipped her quill in ink, she opened her mouth.

"There is no end to his greed. At this point, an invasion by the Kurkans would benefit us more."

Count Valtein and Laurent cleared their throats in chorus. Jennie tried to hide an amused smile as Countess Melissa laughed out loud at their discomfort.

"Doesn't your secretary communicate with them? First, let's check whether Oberde needs the tax cuts. We'll make the decision based on those findings."

"Okay, princess. We'll proceed as you say."

Laurent replied politely. Jennie hesitantly signed the document and muttered bitterly under her breath.

"Or maybe it would be better if I myself go to Oberde."

"...."

Silence filled the office. Her unconscious words created a heavy atmosphere. She felt herself become still—she regretted spilling her thoughts like that. Now the atmosphere was awkward and suffocating no less.

Luckily, a voice from outside intervened, breaking the tension.

"My Royal Highness, this is Baroness Sinael."

"Please enter."

But as soon as Jennie saw the baroness' anxious countenance, Jennie braced herself for awful news. Nonetheless, her calm exterior didn't shatter.

Baroness Sinael worked at the main palace, and her visits would always mean grave news. She entered the office, her face looking pale and tired. All eyes were fixed on her as she clenched the sides of her long dress.

"The barbarians...sent a letter to the royal palace."

"...!"

Jennie jumped out of her seat as everyone looked at Baroness Sinael with terror in their eyes.

"It says, *'I would like to have friendly relations with Estia. Thus, I would like to send an envoy for the conference for a meeting...'*"

Sinael held her breath for a moment and then said in a trembling voice.

"The barbarian king said he would lead the envoys and visit Estia himself."

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## Chapter 12

### Chapter 12 – The Land of the Beasts

The Kurkans were barbarians who inherited the blood of the beasts. They're said to have existed on the continent even before history was first recorded.

They lived in the cluster of deserts located at the western end of the continent and were divided into tribes based on the kind of beast each one inherited their blood from.

Only one person could unite these tribes—the king of Kurkans.

How exactly the king came to power, no one knows. However, most guess that it was based on the concept of survival of the fittest.

The continent condemned the savage behavior of the Kurkans and called them barbarians. The main cause of their disdain was due to this race's custom of marriage by captivity.

Companionship was extremely precious to the Kurkans. The moment they deemed someone to be their mate, they would resort to all sorts of means to obtain their hand. If they couldn't capture them through lawful means, they wouldn't hold back from committing a crime, even going as far as to abducting them forcibly doing whatever they pleased.

However, the countries of the continent could only criticize this practice verbally. They wouldn't dare take military action. And that was because they'd already tasted defeat.

In the past, the countries had formed a coalition and tried to invade the Kurkans' lands.

On the surface, it was a war that condemned the customs of Kurkans, but their real intention was different. The coalition's insidious desire was to capture a large quantity of Kurkans, and sell them at a high price as slaves. Parties with the same interests allied themselves with the coalition and ambitiously participated in the conquest, but it soon disintegrated.

The land of the beasts...? This bears no exaggeration.

The continent's people could never get used to the climate of the Kurkan's lands. The hot sun blazed right above their soil during daytime. And at night, the ground turned cold like ice. They simply couldn't comprehend how the barbarians managed to live there.

However, the climate was the least of their troubles. The Kurkans were born to be great warriors. They were sharp, brave, and knew every inch of the desert. Hence, Kurkans played with the Allied forces like toys, attacking them by using topography and climate to their advantage. After suffering from a series of miserable defeats, they decided to retreat forever.

To this day, the continent chooses to tolerate the Kurkans' presence, left with no choice. And the Kurkans lived in their isolated world, with no interference from the continent.

But now, the delicate peace was about to be broken.

This was the first time the Kurkans asked for an audience with the other countries on the continent. The belligerents wanted peace and were seeking harmony.

However, Jennie honestly couldn't believe that. She knew all about that the present king bloodthirsty nature. He wore a bloodied crown, having seized the throne after killing the previous king. For that fierce and violent man wanted peace? Something must be amiss.

Estia was located near Kurkan's border, and in case a massive war broke out, Estia would be the first country to take the blow and would suffer the most. So, she needed to start planning right away.

Jennie's mind was racing when suddenly, the thought of a man she spent a night with suddenly popped into her mind. The arrogant Kurkan who tricked her by assuming the identity of a prostitute,

Jennie somehow imagined him wearing a crown...

She could picture his conceited yet beautiful face vividly. The brilliance that exuded from his bright eyes was forever seared in her mind. Undoubtedly, he would've been a perfect match for the



splendid golden crown.

However, the idea that the king of Kurkan went to the illegal prostitution quarters of a foreign country and pretended to be a pleasure worker was absurd and impossible. Jennie shuddered at the ridiculous thought and calmly examined the situation.

"What did His Majesty say?"

"It was a demand for us to have friendly relations with them. He asked whether we could accept it right away. He also requested us to prepare for a conference with the Kurkans."

"I see."

A welcoming conference for the Kurkans...? The mere thought of it was irritating. The aristocrats were always starving for amusement and would surely not miss this opportunity. And among those greedy bastards was Seokjin of Oberde.

Tired, Jennie pressed her temples. Just the thought of meeting him made her head ache. She'd hoped to avoid him as much as possible until their wedding day, but now, there was nothing she could do.

"I guess we need to prepare for this special guest's welcome."

Count Valtein nodded his head, tension evident in his eyes. Jennie sighed with resignation.

Meeting the new king of Kurkan and Seokjin of Oberde, who's been fighting against Kurkan all his life, at the same time? Nothing could be worse than this.

She could only hope for a bloodbath to not occur in the conference hall.

The afternoon ended with the finalizing the plans and discussions of details of the welcome conference. By the time they finished an informal inspection of the banquet hall, the sun had already started setting.

Now, it was time for her to go back to the queen's quarters.

Reluctantly, Jennie stepped towards the palace, and the closer she got, the stiffer her body became, her chest heaving with heavy breaths.

The maids of the queen's quarter approached her. Unlike her bright and cheery maids, the queen's maids wore a gloomy look. Their faces lacked any kind of emotion as they muttered under their breaths.

Jennie followed the pallid looking lady maids, who escorted her to the reception room. All the servants soon retreated as the doors closed behind them.

Jennie spoke carefully, "Mother."

"Oh? You've arrived?" The pretty woman's face bloomed like a flower, as if her joy came straight her heart. To anyone else, her smile would've seemed gorgeously refreshing.

Her brown, curly hair was swept to one of her neck, and the droopy shape of her blue eyes made her seem kindhearted. Just by her appearance, one could tell her delicate nature. Cerdina, the queen of Estia, was the exact opposite of Jennie.

"I've been waiting for you, Jennie."

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## Chapter 13

### Chapter 13 – She Does Not Remember Me

Cerdina welcomed Jennie with a melodious, tender voice and affectionate eyes. Jennie trembled slightly but quickly suppressed it, not wanting to appear nervous. Since all her attention was on Cerdina, she failed to notice her surroundings.

The room was filled with colorful dresses and jewelry boxes. Cerdina gently smiled and explained it to a surprised Jennie, "Seokjin sent all these presents for you. They're extremely precious and beautiful..."

He must've known that if he sent the gifts to her, she would've returned them. So, he sent them directly to the queen's quarters.

The thought of wearing ornaments chosen by him made her sick. She wanted to get rid of them right away. But now that they were in Cerdina's hands, there was nothing she could do but accept it.

Cerdina picked up a velvet box and pulled out a glittering necklace, embellished with expensive jewels. Jennie meekly approached her and sat down. Jennie felt the cold metal touch her bare skin as Cerdina put the necklace on her. The moment she heard the click of the latch locking, she felt herself being bound by shackles.

Cerdina repeatedly complimented the necklace.

"It really suits you! The moment I saw it, I thought it was meant just for you. Seokjin sure has great taste."

Like always, Jennie replied with an air of indifference, "Thank you, Mother."

Content on seeing her wear the necklace, Cerdina smiled. With graceful movements, she got up and held out her hand towards Jennie. Jennie reluctantly accepted the gesture and the two of them headed to the dining hall.

As they seated themselves, Jennie was on the edge. She paid careful attention to her movements, trying not to make any mistake.

Time went by as they dined on light appetizers, the main course

consisting of seafood and meat, and a sweet dessert. The whole time, they kept making small talk.

"Too bad Jongin can't be with us. He's so addicted to hunting..."

"He promised to catch a fox for you, didn't he, mother?"

"Yes, he's the only one who takes care of me. As his mother, I'm happy with his extreme devotion towards his parents, but I'm afraid I might get jealous once he becomes the crown prince."

As the meal came to an end, Jennie's gaze landed on the cake in front of her while she sipped on the wine. The man's voice lingered in her ears, urging her.

*Eat more. You're thinner than the winter branches.*

He'd insisted on her having a lot of bread and stew. A bitter smile bloomed on her face as she thought of him. Suddenly, she felt tempted by the dessert.

Maybe she could have a small bite? The thick, cheese-filled cake seemingly kept calling out to her. She courageously stretched out her hand.

"Jennie," a fierce voice resonated as if intending to whip her.

Frightened, Jennie retracted her hand. It was certain. She'd lost her mind. Eating a cake in front of Cerdina, of all people?

"I just wanted to taste it. Just a small bite. I-I was just wondering what it tasted like," awkward excuses poured out from her mouth.

Cerdina stared at Jennie and then softly smiled as she asked her, "I hope you're not neglecting your diet, especially when you have your wedding coming up soon."

"Yes, I will be careful. I'm sorry."

Jennie put down the fork. The still half-full plate haunted her eyes. She'd already finished the amount she usually ate, but she felt especially hungry that day.

She tried to resist the appetizing smell of food and soothed her empty stomach with wine instead.

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The man, nimbly straddled on the thick branches of a nearby tree, looked at the beautiful royal palace.

Immersed in the darkness, the palace of Estia was dimly illuminated by the moonlight. The elegant scenery was like a work of art; however, there was no spark of interest in the man's golden eyes, evident from the way he narrowed slightly.

She's trapped like a doll in a picturesque palace.  
She'd grown so thin since the last time he saw her.

His eyes turned cold.

"Liam!" A slender young man climbed up the tree and called out to him. The young man perched himself on the lower branch like an agile cat, "Everything's ready. As you requested, I sent a letter, got a reply, and finished the rest. "

Then he tilted his head and asked. "What do you intend to do next?"

Liam thought of an answer to Suha's question. His one-night stand with her wasn't a part of his original plan.

There were many reasons as to why he came to Estia, but the most important one was his interest in Jennie. He wanted to check whether she still remembered him. He thought that if he met her and spoke to her once, he would be able to let go of the past memories. Perhaps, if she wanted, he would've granted her requests as well.

But when he heard that she was looking for a one-night stand, that plan fell apart like dry sand.

It wasn't uncommon for those of noble blood to be proud of fulfilling their sexual desires through shady means. But the fact that he pretended to be a gigolo to approach her was beyond ridiculous.

He wanted to offer a proper one-night stand to this princess who pretended to be chaste on the outside, but behaved impudently. Not used to experience, she was obviously afraid. After all, it was her first

time. As Liam reminisced about the night of their affair, he recalled her small whisper.

*I wanted to die.*

It wasn't a lie. She had made up her mind. He could see it in her black, seemingly dead eyes.

Liam's lips twisted into a frown, "She does not remember me."

Suha rolled his eyes and opened his mouth. "It was a thing in the past. Besides, you've changed a lot since then."

He was right. The present Liam had changed beyond recognition.

"Yes, that's right. But first..." Liam spoke, making a stabbing gesture in the air, as if wanting to kill the night.

In a much more serious and sinister tone, he asked, "Shall we go meet the princess?"

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## Chapter 14

### Chapter 14 – The King of Kurkans

It's said that if a beast is shackled from birth, then he won't break away from it even after growing up.

Jennie was well aware of this fact. The beast wouldn't break the shackles, not because it loved or feared its master, but because it was so used to captivity

Even if someone taught the beast how to break free, it still wouldn't try. Some would call the beast foolish for not doing it, but maybe the thought of shackles were deeply ingrained in its mind that it wouldn't even think that breaking free was possible.

Jennie was the same. But, she feared the queen instead.

And every moment, she had feared for her life.

The queen was Jennie's biggest nightmare.

All tragedies start with a blazing love. The king fell in love at first sight with a country girl while attending a banquet. Her frank tone and bright smile were something mesmerized the king, who had never seen something like that before. Thus, the girl who grew up in a small family in the province became the queen of Estia.

However, merely being good didn't let her survive in the palace. With no one backing her up, she slowly became thinner day by day. All she could do was cling on to the king's love.

At the pinnacle of her misery, Jennie was born. She experienced labor complications and barely managed to give birth. Afterwards, she was rendered infertile.

A barren queen was a disgrace to the royal family, and the once blazing love fell cold... The powerless, weak king easily complied with the demands of the greedy nobles who wanted to depose the queen. Soon after, she was driven out of the palace in a miserable shape.

It happened when Jennie was just three years old. She couldn't even clearly comprehend things at that age, but her mother's last words were vivid in her memory.

*I'm sorry Leah, I'm very sorry.*

*You should continue to live...*

*Do not disobey Cerdina.*

*Just follow her words, no matter what.*

And with those last words, the queen was discovered dead. The royal family announced that the dejected queen had decided to end her life, but everyone knew it wasn't suicide.

The ambitious Countess Cerdina replaced the throne her mother once occupied. However, Cerdina's entry into the royal palace was tumultuous. She was carrying a baby boy.

The boy was Jongin half brother. Queen Cerdina was in a relationship with the king even before the previous queen had been expelled.

This caused the society of Estia to descend into chaos. The fact that the new queen wasn't a virgin and had an affair with the king caused turmoil.

Such a disgrace...

However, with her powerful family and the king's favour, she was able to get her son declared as the heir to the throne, causing the clamor against her to fade away.

The highly ambitious, cunning Cerdina always claimed, "I know nothing about the complicated politics and the government. Wouldn't it be enough for me to carry out all my domestic duties?"

However, she was as vicious as a viper and was able to dominate the nobles and turn them into her puppets.

Cerdina knew very well how to handle the daughter of the deposed queen. She carefully planned her moves, making sure not to do



anything that would make it seem like she discriminating against Jennie outright. Instead, she controlled the princess' every move, molding her nature and habits to her liking.

Slowly, she tightened her hold over Jennie's life.

*"You are the flower of Estia."*

The queen's words were seared into her mind at a young age. It was the reason for Jennie's obsession. She had to become the perfect princess of Estia—her education, work, and beauty needed to be flawless.

She was no different from Estia's art pieces. A cattle raised by the queen, and once fat, sold to the market. This was her purpose all along.

Only the people closest to her knew the truth about how Cerdina secretly abused her. The others were ignorant and spoke highly of the queen and her kind-hearted and benevolent motherly nature.

Jennie wanted to scream at such people and ask them, 'What is the use of raising me to be perfect...?'

In the end, didn't she just sell me off to that old Seokjin?'

Jennie stood in front of the mirror, and a beautifully dressed doll-like woman stared back at her.

Her pale face was covered with layers of bright make-up. Her thin, lifeless hair was curled up into an up-do. Her purple eyes seemed even more vivid in contrast to the dark eyeliner on her lids. On her neck was the diamond necklace that Seokjin had gifted her, completing the whole look.

"Princess, I'll finish making the final adjustments to your attire."

Jennie gave her a small nod in reply. The reason for Jennie's extraordinarily beautiful appearance was the conference with the Kurkans.

The rest of the palace was busy preparing for the banquet. As expected, all the nobles had expressed their desire to attend the banquet. In fact, even nobles for all the other countries were visiting

Estia for this special occasion.

Everyone was looking forward to seeing the new king of Kurkans and Seokjin meet each other.

The coward Jin immediately went on the defense when he heard the king was visiting, despite the news that their visit sought peace.

People were well aware of the fact that Jin wouldn't be able to maintain his current level of power if Kurkan and Estia entered into a peace treaty. So, they speculated that Queen Cerdina was making moves in order to take Jin down for the sake of the crown prince.

However, despite the intense political battle brewing underneath, above the surface, a warm and friendly atmosphere arose. Everyone was excited to see the Kurkans, who were known for their breathtaking, outstanding appearances. Jennie's maids talked about that daily.

Finally, the day the Kurkans would visit arrived. The welcome banquet would be held the day after. Right now, they were going to formally greet their visitors. Thus, Cerdina specifically instructed Jennie to dress up extravagantly in order to show off the royal family's pride.

And so, Jennie ended up in this painful, uncomfortable dress.

As the maids dressed Jennie, Baroness Sinael suddenly burst into laughter while chatting with them. Jennie smiled faintly and asked, "What are you talking about?"

The maid replied with flushed cheeks, "They say that the king of the Kurkans is an extremely handsome man."

Countess Melissa, the head of the maids, gave them a menacing glare as she cleared her throat. Immediately, the rest of them stopped chattering, but Jennie put them at ease with a light grin.

It was never good to be overwhelmingly strict. Instead, she lightened the atmosphere since everyone was so excited. But right at that moment, Jennie suddenly felt a great amount of pressure from her guts.

At the distance, underneath the warm rays of the sun, ships were  
nearing the shore of Estia.

They have arrived.

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## Chapter 15

### Chapter 15 — Liam

Proud and huge, the Kurkan's boats and ships touched the soil of Estia. From the distance, she could tell that they came with gifts.

As Jennie watched the glistening white diamonds, which loosely hang on the wooden ships, her vision became hazy. She suddenly remembered the scarce amount of food she had eaten that day—only a handful of wild berries and a cup of tea.

To her utter annoyance, she had been commanded to control her diet more than usual to achieve an even thinner waist. Her maids felt sorry for feeding her such meager meals, but they had to obey orders from above.

Queen Cerdina herself supervised the princess' meals. Should she find out that Jennie consumed even a mere crumb more than what she'd set for her, both her and kitchen maids would suffer such horrendous consequences.

To Cerdina, Jennie was a mere tool, not a human. In order to please the numerous nobles and the visiting Kurkans, Jennie was required to be outstandingly beautiful, especially today.

The discomfort was almost unbearable, Jennie grimaced as she supported her weight by holding on to the banister. She felt dizzy from the pain her tight corset squeezing her empty stomach caused. The fabric digging to her skin, she knew it would leave marks by the time the banquet ends.

Her eyebrows furrowed as her vision swayed. Afraid of messing up her perfectly rouged face, she forced herself to straighten her expression.

On the corner, Countess Melissa watched the princess with pitiful eyes. The suffering this child had gone through...

Among the palace's subordinates, she had been with Jennie the

longest. Seeing Jennie's thin frame shake, she immediately realized what was happening. Approaching her hastily, Countess Melissa quickly supported the princess' collapsing weight.

Jennie could barely manage to stand. However, unaware of their mistress' struggle, the other maids continued to admire Jennie's beauty.

"Princess!" One maid squealed, "Look at how beautiful you are."

"You're the only one who can pull off this dress so magnificently."

"What if the Kurkans fall in love with you?"

Baroness Sinael was the one who spoke last, and upon hearing her comment, Countess Melissa lightly reprimanded her, giving her her most venomous glare.

After a few adjustments here and there, the princess was finally ready at last. Sporting a straight face, she headed off to the royal palace with several maids in tow.

The main hall was the most splendid part of Estia's royal palace. The ceiling was painted with frescoes pertaining to Estia's rich history, the marble columns were inscribed with different kinds of detailed carvings, and the throne was made of gold, ivory and precious gems.

Several esteemed guests had gathered there, but as soon as she entered, Jennie became the center of their attention. She walked faster, making her way to a discreet corner, trying not to bump into any other royal who'd arrived before her.

Jongin smiled crookedly as he spotted Jennie walking around the room. He'd been so busy preparing the countermeasure plans for the Kurkans that they hadn't been able to see her after returning from hunting. He made a mental note to talk to her after the meeting was over.

Feeling his eyes on her, Jennie averted her eyes and, instead, went up to her father and greeted him. Then, she greeted Cerdina, and after acknowledging Jongin's presence with a nod, took the seat designated for her.

Shortly after, the powerful sound of the trumpet rang out; the bustling hall went silent.

Everyone held their breath—their eyes glued at the magnificent doors of the hall. No one dared to blink, for this was a history unraveling before their very eyes.

The gigantic doors opened, letting sunlight pour into the hall. Slowly, the Kurkans' figures became clear—their tanned skin and vivid eyes mesmerizing everyone in the hall.

People exclaimed with wonder at the Kurkans' beauty. Unlike Estia's formal clothes that were tailored to fit perfectly around the body, the Kurkan clothes were sewn with generous amounts of natural fabric that hung loosely around their bodies.

But despite the beautiful appearance of every Kurkan, everyone could distinguish who their leader was just by his appearance.

The man's tanned skin glowed under the sunlight, his body well-endowed the muscles as strong and huge as a beast's. He sauntered in, leisurely placing one foot in front of the other, walking without a care in the world.

His golden eyes carefully scanned the hall, stopping right at the princess, who stared at him with a dumbstruck expression.

This can't be happening...

Jennie's breath hitched, and her heart raced...

What's more, she could see the hint of a smile lingering on his lips as his deep, sharp gaze scoured all over her body.

The man stepped forward, keeping his eyes locked on Jennie. He stopped in front of the royal family, and a familiar low voice echoed throughout the hall.

"May the light bless Estia," the king said with a meaningful smile, "I am the king of Kurkans, Liam."

Jennie clenched the skirt of her gaudy dress, wanting to rip it off.

It was him!



## Chapter 16

### Chapter 16 — Achilles' Heel

In an instant, she felt the earth crumble beneath her heels. She unconsciously dug her nails into her palm; her knuckles turning white as if it would pop out anytime. Jennie could not muster the strength to face Liam anymore.

The man to whom I frittered my chastity away was the King of the Kurkans?

Even the cheap comedy shows open at the public market couldn't be funnier than this. She almost fainted at the hilarious twist of fate.

No, this was from being a mere funny twist of fate. It was highly likely that the King of Kurkan had intentionally approached her.

She felt a shrill pain tearing her chest. She was caught red-handed—the King of Kurkans knew her Achilles' heels.

She used the man, Liam, as a tool for her plans. But ironically, he knew the entire plan.? He knew how she lost her virginity, even her innermost desire to die.

Dread filled her. He might even blackmail her with her biggest secret.

Jennie tried to regain composure by calmly holding her breath amidst all the thoughts that bombarded her. She was in a public place—too many eyes were watching her. Hence, she cannot show any hint of agitation.

She braced her emotions and stared forward with a blank look in her eyes, like a doll. But because of his golden eyes kept on piercing her, this became a hard job to accomplish.

His eyes were latched on Jennie alone. He had been staring at her since he first entered the hall, and had only pulled his gaze when greeting the King.

Unfortunately, people couldn't ignore the ravishing King and his



striking eyes, which blatantly dwelled on a certain person among the crowd.

"...."

Murmurs slowly spread throughout the hall. The aristocrats exchanged glances with each other in a peculiar way.

A beautiful princess known as the flower of Estia and a young, strong King of the savage tribe.

It was indeed a fascinating and excellent plot for a made-up tale. And adding the fact that Jennie was Seokjin's fiancé made it more thrilling to the ears of the engrossed onlookers.

For this matter, some intensely looked at the high and mighty Jin. How would he react when a handsome monarch was eyeing his fiancé like a candy?

Jennie also couldn't help but threw a fleeting gaze at him.

Surely, the tyrant sat at the topmost platform, among the senior nobles who gathered in the royal palace. Hence, with his position, he could watch Jennie and Liam up close.

His face turned red. The simmering anger inside welling up—he as breathed laboriously. His breathing was so heavy and loud; it could be heard as far as Jennie was sitting.

Unable to contain his ire, Seokjin was about to rush out like an angry bull, when a deep dry cough pulled him back to his senses.

"... Ahem."

It was a cough from the King of Estia, whose presence had been ignored until now. Naturally, everyone's attention was diverted to their king, and finally, Jennie was set free from the suffocating eyes of the people. She gulped down a sigh of relief.

The king drew a displeased look, and Liam, in response, slyly pulled off a smile. He coolly shrugged off his lack of courtesy.

As his slender lips upturned, a pleasant atmosphere lingered, slightly concealing his dangerous savageness. The noble class, who scorned his kind, had never seen such an aura emanating from a barbarian.

His beaming face naturally attracted the eyes of the people. The King of Estia coughed again to regain attention as he addressed a reply to Liam.

"Welcome to the Kingdom of Estia."

Surprisingly, Liam politely replied to him, "Thank you for the warm welcome."

Astounded by such polite greeting, the king's face slightly softened. Jennie spits out a curse inside, as her father blindly believed Liam's feigned courtesy.

Putting aside the fact that he set up a false pretense to deceive her... and now... Is he faking an interest in her, too?

His arrival, indeed, meant nothing but trouble. For sure, Jennie thought, he intended to mess around with everything.

Could she still stop him?

However, he had already caught her weakness. Besides, there's not much time left before she would be taken to Oberde. It would all be spent in turning over her work in the palace.

As Jennie impatiently watched over the conversation between Liam and her father, she reckoned what could still be done in a very tight situation like this.

Their conversation on probing one another has been extremely polite. Liam had shown respect to the old king by bowing before him, but not stooping so low which shows inferiority. No, he acted perfectly—not too much, at the same time, not in any way lacking decency.

From the first time she laid her eyes on the king, she knew that he would definitely be a tough opponent.

After wrapping up the conversation with the King, Liam subsequently exchanged a brief greeting with Cerdina and Jongin. And lastly, he

sat in front of Jennie...

This instantly attracted the attention of the aristocrats who had been invigorated by the Liam's sheer display of interest to the princess. Jennie straightened her back and shoulders as she faced the aristocrats whose sparkling eyes burned with curiosity.

"I'm Jennie de Estia." Her speech, thankfully, didn't reflect the turmoil brewing inside.

Calm and regal, she extended her hand to the King of Kurkans. But unlike her composed exterior, the tips of her fingers visibly shook, revealing her anxiety.

Time stopped as Liam accepted the tiny hand of the princess, even more so when his head descended to plant a kiss on the back of it.

It was a form of greeting in Estia—an act of showing respect to a woman.

Despite mimicking Estia's etiquette, Liam's didn't exert an effort to conceal his true nature. Pressing his mouth against her hand, he parted his lips, making sure that his canine teeth grazed her silky skin.

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Jennie eyes slightly widened in surprise, but she remained passive in her stand. Secretly, she balled her free hand buried in the folds of her skirt into a tight fist.

The teeth scraping her skin seemed to remind her of the night they shared. Having enough of it, she retracted her hand, but Liam immediately grasped it tighter and eventually removed his lips.

Many eyes watched them, yet this didn't stop him from doing such a valiant greeting! The expression "bold" was not even enough to describe his act.

What's more, his serene and confident face remained, and his smile had not once faltered. It was only the princess who looked flustered—the red tingle on her cheeks being a clear indication.

Soon, Liam released her hand from his grasp and, as if scalded, Jennie cradled it with her other hand. The sun in broad daylight was bright, and the chandeliers in the hall looked dazzling, even glinting so vibrantly.

But Jennie's heart was shrouded in darkness. Suffocated, it felt like she was drowning in quicksand.

Finally, the welcome banquet came to an end. Jennie immediately stood up from her seat and as if a demon was hot on her trail, departed the hall. In haste, she wasn't able to bid her proper farewell to the nobles, but she didn't care.

Donning a petulant air, she walked without pause, just wanting to go back to her chamber right away, lock all the doors, hide herself underneath her blankets. A strong instinctive desire to flee to a safe place was the only comprehensible thing in her mind at this moment.

Her maids quickly tailed after her. Confused faces behind her, yet Jennie kept her silence.

After confining herself straight in her bedroom, she stayed up all night. She wanted to sleep, but somehow, she couldn't. Thoughts of the man stirred chaos in her head.

The night they spent together, the stories they shared, and the passionate heat—all of these haunted her.

Tossing, turning, and rolling in her bed all night long, she barely slept a wink that night.

Upon popping her eyes open the next day, she woke up a disaster. Dark circles were visible though the thick of her skin, thus, which she concealed by putting on powder.

Then, she headed off to her work.  
And boy, she had heaps of work to do.

While the peace treaty agreement was being established, the Kurkans decided to stay in the Royal Palace of Estia. After the banquet, the two sides would hopefully arrive to a full-scale agreement.

By now, the King of Kurkan had already realized that Estia's old king

was no match for him. There was no doubt in this, Jennie thought dismissively.

The treaty was the last thing on her mind right now—the upcoming welcome banquet for the Kurkans holding the utmost urgency. Just the thought of running into all sorts of people, including Jin at the conference, made her head spin.

Prospects of the planned treaty would be kept at bay during the banquet as the Kurkans would have to mingle with Jin—an atrocious person who bears malice against their kind. Hence, talks of the treaty might raise a dispute.

The quill set aside, Jennie signed the last document on her table. She scowled as a sharp headache hit her hard, making it hard to focus on her work.

She stood up to clear her head. Otherwise, she would commit mistakes, which would guarantee irreversible misfortunes.

"I'll head out to breathe some fresh air," she called out.

Countess Melissa, who had been assisting her, drew a worried look. It had been a while since Jennie had used those words. This news was taking its toll on the princess.

Jennie went out for a walk with her maids, only after assuring Melissa that she felt nothing but fine.

She walked along the corridor beside the courtyard and breathed in the dewy scent of grasses, which soon soothed her nerves.

Jennie took a long look at the garden.

Amidst the ornamental plants, there was a field of tuberose. This plant's white flower buds that formed in clusters looked adorable. A little more time and they will be full bloom, these flowers needed extra pampering. Jennie was about to tell the gardener to tend to the tuberose when her gaze caught a familiar figure in the distance.

Upon realizing who it was, she instantly froze. The air snatched from her lungs.

He was there.

Under the specks of sunlight peeping through the voids of the leaves, Liam was leaning against a tree, idly smoking.

It was known that Kurkans like to smoke tobacco, but their cigarettes were different from those of the continent. The hazy fog that disperses from the smoke was quite unique. The cool yet subtly sweet scent, filling her nostrils, suited him.

Immediately, her maids started whispering from behind.

"Is he the King of the Kurkans?"

"Oh my god. Is he real? His looks!"

"But isn't he too fierce? I'm scared of him."

Countess Melissa approached Jennie and said, "Princess, what should we do?"

They have to leave this place right at this moment. Because her relationship with the man is not formally known. But even if she already knows that, she paused, and looked at Liam.

He was looking down on his feet when he heard the maids giggling from afar. Hence, he slowly lifted his weary eyes—revealing his hawk-like, golden orbs.

Instantly, their eyes met—but was cut short when Liam veered his gaze from her.

He took a small pack of cigarette out of his chest and discarded up the leaf tobacco he smoked. While he busied himself, Jennie strode deeper into the shady part of the corridor where she formerly stood. All the while, keenly watching the man's moves.

A few steps taken, and he was out of her sight. Jennie turned her back, intent on leaving him to his peace.

"Stop right there."

She was leading the maids out of the corridor when suddenly, large hands grabbed her arms.

"...Ahh!"

Jennie shrieked and stumbled as he pulled her arm, making her hit his solid chest. She hastily looked up, and their eyes locked in an instant.

"Where are you headed to, Princess?" he said in a low, malicious tone.

In this position, the warmth from his body surrounded her. His soft whisper intensely stirred her up.

"I'm sure you have something to say."

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## Chapter 17

### Chapter 17 – His Services

The startled maids froze and reacted too late. Countess Melissa grabbed her skirt in anger and shouted at him.

"That is too rude!"

But as soon Melissa looked into Liam's eyes, she froze. Her face went pale, and breath hitched. Her body trembled with absolute fear. Jennie immediately stood in front of Countess Melissa, protecting her from his line of sight.

"He's the king."

Liam turned to Jennie's. Countess Melissa breathed a sigh of relief as the attention was off of her. Jennie then looked straight into his eyes.

"Touching the body of a royalty without permission is a breach of respect in Estia. As long as you're here, I'd like you to follow Estia's etiquette."

The maids were merely fulfilling their duties. Liam should have to do the same. But surprisingly, he admitted his mistake.

"I made a mistake."

The maids, as well as Jennie, shrunk back in surprise. They couldn't believe that an apology came out so easily from the mouth of a king. No royalty ever acted this way; admitting one's mistake meant giving up their pride.

But Liam admitted his fault as if it was nothing and gently looked at Jennie. She fought the urge to look away and met his steady gaze.

"Hunting is like second nature to Kurkan's..." He started to explain.

His lips pulled up into a smile, "So if you turn your back to me, my natural instinct would be to chase and catch you."



In contrast to his relaxed smile, his words carried a frightening meaning, causing the atmosphere to become tense. The way he talked and behaved, it was as if Jennie was prey for him. But she didn't budge. She considered being silent to be a much better option than having a nonsensical argument with him.

Liam stared at her, and slowly, his mouth lifted up into a smile.

"Will you show me around the palace?"

His words were like poison. Jin's fiancé hanging out with the King of Kurkans? It would be the gossip of the century.

She was sure that if she accepted, a rumor claiming that the King of Kurkans was hitting on the princess of Estia would spread like wildfire.

Despite being aware of this, she couldn't reject his request. Compared to the powerful weapon Liam could use against Jennie, the rumor was nothing.

Liam held out his hand, asking her to escort him. Reluctantly, she laid her hand on top of his in acceptance.

"Princess..."

Frightened, the maids called out to Jennie's. Countess Melissa trembled as she recalled the fear she felt while confronting Liam.

"I'm fine. You may go ahead."

"But—"

"I have to entertain the guest."

After comforting the terrified maids, Jennie leads the way as she showed him around. Liam's followed her at a leisurely pace. She tried to head to a secluded place, but it was impossible to avoid the people's curious eyes completely. With every step they took, the more gazes followed them.

To Jennie, their eyes felt like bees stinging her continuously.

She walked faster. Only after reaching a quiet garden did her breathing return to normal.

Around them, shrubs and bushes stood, concealing their figures from passers-by. In the middle of the garden, there was a fountain installed over a square slab of stone, from which water serenely poured out.

The fountain was in the form of a sculpture, carved by a famous artist. This masterpiece was honed according to the beautiful, naked form of a male deity. All over the palace of Estia, such works of art laid unattended in gardens.

Liam stopped as Jennie stopped in front of the fountain. After confirming that there were finally alone, did she turned around and faced him.

Unlike the delicate, finely adorned palace of Estia, Liam was strong and wild. He stood out against the splendid palace like a drop of blood against stark white skin.

"Did you know this from the beginning?"

Liam raised his brows, so Jennie repeated her question, her face devoid of any expression.

"I'm asking you if you approached me knowing I'm the princess of Estia."

Asking that question took a lot of courage. Instead of explaining himself, Liam merely said,

"What if I say yes?"

"..."

Now that they were alone, Liam immediately revealed his true colors, dropping any pretense of etiquette. His attitude was crude and straightforward.

Jennie couldn't reply. Liam laughed and stepped closer to her. "What if I knew and approached you? What will you do?"

"I'm wondering whether you will take advantage of my weakness and use it against me." His eyes twinkled as he listened to her words with

great delight, finding everything that she says fascinating.

"Liam." He suddenly interjected.

She didn't understand what he meant. In a friendly tone, he continued.

"Don't refer to me as the king of Kurkans. Call me Liam."

Is this a command or a request?? Either way, she didn't have a choice, so she tried calling him by his name.

"Liam..."

It felt odd calling him as casually as this. As his name rolled from her tongue, her heart raced. To conceal her agitation, she toughened up her tone.

"I want you to clarify your actions. Do you regard me as a princess?" She calmly retorted.

"Your perception of me will dictate how I should treat you—whether as the king of Kurkans...or a prostitute."

For this, Liam burst into laughter, finding her outburst pure adorable. Jennie, on the other hand, was fixated on his pointy canines, which was revealed as his mouth opened wide.

"If I ask you to treat me as a prostitute, will you pay me for my services?"

Indeed, he loved to play with her words. Jennie pursed her lips and kept her ire at bay, "I'll give you as much as you want."

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## Chapter 18

### Chapter 18 – Estia's Crown Prince

Her face turned red, but she replied with a bold tone. She wasn't used to this kind of conversation, causing her to pat her flushed cheeks with the back of her hands in order to cool it down. Liam proceeded to sit down on the fountain's edge.

"In public, I'll treat you like a princess. But when we're alone, can we just act comfortably?"

"Comfortably?"

"The cheeky attitude suits you better than acting like a prim and proper royal princess," He raised one elegant eyebrow, "Just like that night."

The words he added carried a significant meaning, but she chose to ignore it.

"If you choose to treat me as a princess, make sure to stay in your limits. Like how you laid your hands on me earlier today—"

Before she could finish speaking, Liam suddenly grabbed her wrist. Slyly, he replied as he looked into Jennie's eyes.

"But we're alone now—so I don't have to treat you as a princess."

Are all beasts like this?

Tired of his insolent actions, Jennie glared at him, not uttering a single word. But Liam's attention was on something else. He mumbled with a frown on his face.

"Darn it... You're thinner than before. Are you eating properly?"

Her skinny wrist was remarkably different from his large hand. As a part of the preparations for the welcome banquet for the Kurkans, she had been put on even stricter diet—making her thinner than before.

Instead of explaining, Jennie took her hand out of his grasp. Upon noticing his now empty hands, Liam quickly dipped his hands in the fountain.

How odd...? Suddenly, he started washing his hands. Did he find her hands dirty then?

She couldn't believe it. He was so hard to decipher. Why would he do something like that in the middle of their conversation? Jennie bit her lip and reluctantly brought the issue plaguing her mind.

"The things that happened that night... Can you keep it to yourself?"

The thought of others knowing her plan scared her. She couldn't imagine how bad things would get if Liam told her secret to others.

Liam's eyes narrowed as he noticed Jennie's desperation. He tilted his head sideways and laughed.

"I don't know."

Hearing his ambiguous reply, Jennie felt her stomach drop. She couldn't bear it anymore and cried out.

"What do you want from me?! What—" She exclaimed, but was cut short upon his next course of action.

He'd shoved something inside her mouth, making the whites of her eyes widen. She didn't know what it was, but she still chewed on it. As she munched on the tender, sticky pulp, a sweet taste pervaded her mouth. Her body felt ecstatic as the sweet taste satisfied the deprivation she'd felt from not eating.

"You need to spit out the seeds."

His long, slender fingers pried her mouth open, and Liam took the seed lying on top of her tongue while he grinned at her.

"That was a dried date palm. Did you like it?"

"...!"

Her face flushed red as she finally realized what he'd just done. She was engrossed by the sweet taste of the fruit that she couldn't grasp his actions.

She couldn't say anything. Confused, she stared at Liam, her cheeks still red. He casually pushed another date between her lips, which her mouth accepted willingly.

"I only want one thing."

As she tasted the strong, sweet flavor on her tongue once again, Liam whispered with a dreary look.

"I want you to accept whatever I give you."

?

The underlying meaning of his whisper was implicit. Her heart leaped fast. As if possessed by something, Jennie delightfully savored the date in her mouth.

Dried date palms were not a staple food in Estia. She had eaten it only once when a Kurkan slave gave it to her when she was still but a child.

That was such a long time ago. So long that Jennie could no longer remember the taste of the dried date palm—nor the face of the boy who so kindly shared his food to her.

Savoring it, she felt elated with its unfamiliar sweetness. Sucking every date dry of its saccharine pulp, soon Jennie unintentionally sucked her own lips. Hence, emitting slurping sounds to the air.

A tinge of regret lingered on the tip of her tongue.  
In contrast to her, Liam didn't find it embarrassing.

Rather, he was deeply invested in getting her to consume some nourishment for her frail body.

The probing eyes of the king watched Jennie as she feasted on the dates he brought with him. Before he stuffs the fruit into her mouth, she turns her head down and spits the seeds on her palms.

Now that she had finished eating all, she appeared clueless of what she must do with it.

For a moment, he hesitated and reached out his hands. Liam grasped the seeds coated with her saliva and instantly hurled it to the bushes. Jennie did not conceive such a stunt right away, hence, Liam was fast to supply a quick explanation. "It's a seed, so it shall be returned to the soil."

She found no fault in his words, and nodded in acquiesce. For sure, the gardener wouldn't mind some small seeds littered here in his work area. He probably won't take notice of it.

Jennie wiped her lips and, without a word, drew close to the fountain and washed her hands. While washing off the sticky residue left on her hands, she sneakily took a glimpse of Liam.

She found everything about him peculiar. Maybe because he was from a foreign land?? Everything that he did perplexed her. Most of all, he utterly ruined her systematic routine for today.

Alas! She realized it too late. Cerdina would be inspecting all the preparations for the upcoming conference. And by preparation, it included herself! My, did she finish all dates knowing that she would have to wear a waist-tight dress tomorrow in front of Cerdina.

Worry was etched on her face as she feared her belly would bulge out.

Despite the train of regrets, she could not resist eating the sweet dates, which melted in her mouth.

When was the last time I had eaten well?? She could not even remember it—oh, but she did!

Quickly, the aftermath of their heated night occupied her train of thoughts, the time Liam fed her a generous amount of bread and stew. She scowled upon remembering so.

Moving behind her, Liam brought her back to her senses when he grasped her hand, to which Jennie jolted in surprise. She was even more bewildered when Liam put something on her palm. He then gently closed her hand with his, making her clench it.

As she looked down, she saw a box of dates. Jennie blinked her eyes

as she peered on an evenly arranged dates, enclosed in an elegant box.

Looking at Liam's appearance, he looked as if he devours meat with blood dripping on it. But seeing him carry this box of dates was a bit surprising, looked out of character even.

"Kurkans believe that sweet food can expel bad spirits. I also like sweets. Take my gift along with you."

As soon as she heard this, she rigidly closed the lid of the box—the delicious dates disappearing under it.

She shoved the box to him. It was a firm refusal. Instead of accepting the box, Liam retorted.

"I didn't put poison on it."

"It's not like that. I cannot accept this, so take it with you."

"Why?"

"Because I am on a diet." She blurted out.

Liam's eyes sparked with interest, the thought of her starving herself intentionally riled him up. "Diet for what?"

"..."

"The reason does not involve you at the very least."

She didn't want his pity at all. Instead of letting their conversation take an undesired path, Jennie veered the topic. "Why did you come here in Estia?"

Gazing at him directly in his eyes, she asked intrepid, "Are you certain that you don't need anything from me?"

"Of course, I do." He jerked his head to the direction of the box.

"Eat all of those. It's an order from someone who knows your weakness." He touched the corner of the box. The oiled wood was smooth without any scratch. "Should I feed you more?"



Her face stiffened as he chuckled. She absolutely could not be swayed anymore. With his threatening words, she was compelled to accept the box of sweets, and uttered in a cold voice.

"I ask you to forget what happened that night. If you really regard me as the princess of this kingdom, please do not behave indecently."

"Behave indecently?"

"I am pertaining to touching without permission."

"Be specific. I am an uneducated beast, so I am completely clueless to what you are insinuating."

"Like suddenly grabbing my arm... or putting your fingers inside my mouth."

A sly smile rose as the corners of Liam's eyes crinkled. Unable to stop himself, he cracked up with a boisterous laugh. Just as water drops from the mouth of the fountain splattered and disturbed the calm stock water beneath, illuminated by the radiant sun, his laughter too caused mayhem in her.

"You like me putting it in, right?"

Jennie squeezed her eyes shut—understanding right away his coarse statement. He was far different from the people she had met before. However, she could not deny that she had always been drawn to people with an unfamiliar background.

She sharply raised her eyes, wanting to snap at him and reprimand him of his lustful temperament. However, her hair suddenly stood as she sensed someone else's presence...

The sounds of shoes bumping against the poorly paved stones of the garden made her heart race.

"...!"

She nearly dropped the box as her face turned aghast. Man with the same silvery hair stared at them with a blank face.

He was Jennie's half-brother, Jongin.

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Without a doubt, he was a handsome man—with silver hair and deep blue eyes mirroring Jennie's features. However, his beauty was only a mask, from what lay inside was hideous than, more than one could ever imagine.

Cold and quick-tempered, the crown prince of Estia was feared by the many. Truth of this matter, Jennie felt horrified whenever he looked at her. Just like this moment, for instance.

His piercing eyes ran all over her. After scrutinizing the box that Jennie is currently carrying, he slowly looked at Liam. While observing the situation, Liam pleasantly greeted Jongin without any hint of embarrassment.

"Good morning, Your Highness!"

At the outset, he pretended to be acquainted with Jongin. Only then did Jongin acknowledge him. The courtesy greeting was dull and wry. Shortly right after, the atmosphere went silent.

A strange aura surrounded them. The sound of the water flowing from the fountain reverberated amidst the silence. After the muffling silence, Jongin finally opened his mouth.

"I didn't know that the King of Kurkans will be here."

Liam struck back, "Is this a place I am prohibited from entering?"

"Well, I don't know what the custom of Kurkan is like." Jongin gritted his teeth and said, "But here in Estia, it is not good to see an unmarried woman alone with a man."

He glanced back at Jennie while spiteful words spilled from his mouth, which sounded like daggers aimed at her.

"Sister."

Jennie bit her lips as he called her "sister." Although Jongin was her half-brother, he has never treated her respectfully. On the contrary, Jennie was harshly educated to respect the crown prince, Jongin

politely.

He used to call Jennie by her name or call her sister whenever he felt like it. It seemed that he formally addressed her because the king of Kurkans was around. After all, there was no good in finding out that the royal family was a mess.

"I came to tell you something. Let's go to a silent place."

He said it in a tone of suppressed anger. She dealt with this situation before, and knew very well how Jongin's anger would escalate if she resisted longer.

Therefore, Jennie answered submissively, "Yes, Your Highness."

With that, Jongin snatched her wrist right and roughly pulled her with him. Her foot stumbled across the jagged edges of the slab of stones, and her body tottered, but Jongin did not care.

While being dragged away, Jennie looked back at Liam. She excruciatingly tolerated the pain and was able to gaze at him with a serene face.

Their eyes met. Liam's eyes never left Jennie's form. He was displeased and was ready to strangle the man to death. However, Jongin was Estia's next ruler, and disputing with him would rather make things complicated. What's more, making such commotion would likely affect the princess.

But still, he couldn't help but mouth? Need help?

His golden eyes hoped a reply.

In his disappointment, however, Jennie lowered her eyes indicating her refusal.

This is for the better, she thought.

She did not want to be dragged by Jongin. Deep inside, she was desperate for his help. But it has been a long time since she realized that following her heart is naive.

That man is the king of Kurkans who came to devour Estia. He must have premeditated all of his political plans. Even though his intention

is not clear as of the moment, it is best not to get involved with him.

Jennie dismissed her thoughts, and unbelievably shook her head. She felt Liam's persistent gaze, but she ignored it and blindly permitted Jongin to drag her away.

As soon as they arrived in the nook of the garden, far from Liam's sight, her body was roughly pushed against a tree. Her short dress was scraped and torn by the wooden bushes.

Brutally, Jongin pulled her hair—wrecking her beautifully curled mane. It was so strong her head tilted backward.

"What were you doing?"

With such force, she feared her neck was going to snap anytime. She was overwhelmed with pain, Jongin's words sounded vague to her ears.

Shaking her, Jongin asked her again.

"I asked! What were you doing with that man?" His blue eyes gleamed with madness.

As if him maltreating her was not yet enough, he did something much more horrible.

Disgust crossed Jennie's eyes as soon as she felt him grope her. He intrusively touched her shoulders, chest, and waist... and even tried to raise the hem of her skirt.

She barely mustered strength when she slapped Jongin on his cheek—hard. Her strength may be far inferior to him, but she couldn't let such repulsive conduct continue.

Jongin released her hair and then forcefully flung her. An ample distance from him, Jennie scowled at Jongin, who looked possessed by the devil.

"Don't sway your hips in front of the Kurkans."

Towering over Jennie, he coldly warned her.

"Understand, sister?"



## Chapter 19

### Chapter 19 – Intruder

Jennie felt her face flush from anger as she listened to the insults Jongin spat at her. She huffed out angrily and straightened up her posture, fixing up her disheveled state of dress before shooting him a sharp glare.

"Don't worry, brother," she hissed, "Even if Jin scares me, I won't do that," she reassured.

Jongin's face had winced momentarily at the mention of Jin, before schooling his features into a scowl as he stared down Jennie with a manic grin.

"You're good." he said, "Very good at denying, even hiding in the gardens with the King of Kurkans, no less," he whispered. His face drawing near until his mouth was a breath away from her ear.

He let go of his grip on her hair, hands trailing down, caressing her cheek. His long, slender fingers patted her cheek gently, quirking his head at her with a mocking concern.

"Did he tell you he's in love with you?" he asked, pouting at her, which made Jennie clench her jaw,

"Tell you to sleep with him?" Jennie forced her mouth to keep shut.

She wanted to tell him that he did, but she thought otherwise.

"Nothing happened between us," she told him, "He was only interested in me because I am Jin's fiancé," she finished explaining. Jongin only stared at her silently, observing her for any signs of dishonesty. He didn't trust a single word, but for now, he'll let it be.

They were close before, him and Jennie. Back when they were still young. They'd take care of each other, as much as they would with a real sibling.

And Jongin had absolutely adored Jennie, gave her what she wanted and more, granted her every wish.

And Jennie was the same, due to her lonesome nature, she found a company with Jongin.

Eventually, people often mistook them as siblings with exactly the same parents, and they never bothered to correct them.

But like all families, with time, they eventually grew apart.

As Jennie grew, he watched her discover her many talents, growing further and further successful, needing him less and lesser. And it tore at Jongin, made him feel inadequate of standing beside her.

Slowly, his admiration turned into jealousy. His love turned into hate.

He didn't like how she was flourishing. He wanted to crush her at all costs.

And as their relationship crumbled before her very eyes, Jennie learned a valuable lesson, which led to completely breaking off their once strong bond.

Her mother's death was the key. When she realized the real reason, she couldn't keep up with the pretenses anymore, and finally left Jongin. She couldn't reconcile what she knew of him now, to the person he used to be.

And when Jennie broke away, Jongin's true colors began to shine.

After staring into his angry cerulean orbs, and seeing he had nothing else to say, Jennie shrugged off his grip on her chin, jerking her head suddenly and pushed past him to leave. Jongin stepped back when she did and called out.

"Jennie," he said, and she paused. His voice made unpleasant shivers run down her spine. His fingers once more found purchase in her hair, as he tucked in some strands behind her ear, the callouses caressing her skin softly.

"You must learn to listen to me, sister." he told her before giving her a serious look, "And don't wander off where I can't see," he warned, and Jennie gave him a terse nod.

All she wanted was for all of this to be over. She was so tired.

When Jennie finally returned to the Princess' chambers, the maids were already gathered, waiting for her, with Countess Melissa among their ranks, standing in front of the maids.

As soon as the Countess had seen her, she immediately ran up to her with a cry.

"Princess!" she exclaimed as she neared and paused in front of her, fidgeting. "The Crown Prince had been searching for you." she informed her, and Jennie nodded.

"Yes, I've seen him." Jennie replied with a soft smile, and Countess Melissa stared at her agape, before closing her mouth, "There's nothing to worry about." she reassured. But even with her assurance, the worry was still present in the Countess' eyes. And as much as Jennie wanted to elaborate, she couldn't risk telling her more.

She remembered the way Jongin had pulled her aside, grabbing her by her hair, and she remembered she was still quite a mess. She hadn't been able to think up an excuse to explain her poor state of dress. Nodding at her, Countess Melissa soon pulled out a shawl, and draped it across her shoulders.

Jennie thanked her briefly before heading inside her chambers.

Once inside, the maids served her tea, whilst she sat on a stool and took a sip. For now, the warmth of the liquid as it ran down her throat was enough to soothe her racing heart. She felt her muscles loose then the tension as she took a deep breath, savoring the sensation of the Countess brushing her hair.

Halfway through her tea, the Countess broke the silence, albeit hesitant.

"Princess, if I may," she began while continuing to brush her hair, "What happened with the King of Kurkans?"

Jennie paused at the question and set the cup of tea back down on the table. It was very easy to lie her way out of this. And so with expert ease, she put on a calm expression and a reassuring smile.



"He was only curious of me." she answered, "It seemed that he was highly curious on who is Jin of Oberde's fiancé," She finished and took another sip of the tea, and Countess Melissa nodded in understanding.

She didn't even doubt a single word.

"That's a relief." The countess sighed, her worries easing up, "I've been so worried, especially since it's been a while since you've disappeared. He seems too rough and stern," she aired her concerns. And Jennie was content to let her ramble on as usual. Normally, the countess would have told the nothings of her day, usually involving Jongin. But since she met Liam earlier today, it was so memorable that she couldn't stop talking about it.

"Oh, and his eyes..." the countess recalled, wistfully recalling Liam's face from memory. But as she paused, she immediately realized, with a frown, of how freely she had been speaking. She usually took great care not to talk so casually towards the princess. Meanwhile, Jennie's hand stilled, the tea still unfinished, as she recalled the golden eyes of Liam.

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It was a unique trait, especially among humans. And when angry, it can invoke a deep fear, instinctive as that of a prey when faced with a roaring beast, when you make eye contact.

Soon her thoughts returned to Jongin, and she wondered if he would tell Cerdina what had occurred today. The very thought bothered her. I don't think he'll tell Cerdina, but what if he does??

She frets? Will he just leave it be?? She worried continuously. Cerdina was not like Jongin. He wouldn't just let it go like Jongin would.? I must figure out a way to get out of this. She thought to herself before a sharp pain ran through her head.

The pain was unbearable, and she quickly downed her drink and stood up with a wince.

"Kindly cancel my schedule for today," she tells the Countess, "I'll just

be in my room, reading the reports," she said, and the Countess approached her with a worried look.

"Princess—"

"It's alright," Jennie interrupted, and gave her a soft smile, "I'm alright." she reassured, "Truly, it's only the strict diet I'm on, I just need to rest."

But Melissa was doubtful of her words. She knew there's more to it than that—Jennie was really not well. But she also knew that Jennie wouldn't let her help, and so reluctantly, she gave her a short nod before leaving her alone to allow her the rest she needs.

When the Countess had left, Jennie had also instructed the maids still in her room to leave her be, prohibiting them from further entering until tomorrow morning. Once she was alone, she got dressed in her nightgown, before promptly collapsing on the nearby chair.

She didn't think she had enough strength to eat dinner tonight. Besides, she needs to tone down her eating in anticipation of the upcoming conference. Perhaps for dinner, she'll only request two slices of apple, as she wanted to rest as soon as she could. She really wanted to be alone for now.

With a sigh, she turned to her window, staring at nothing in particular. She watched the skies turn red as the sun was setting, and perched on her chair, she watched as the daylight ended and darkness descended.

Her knuckles clench on the edge of her armrest, watching as the moon lights up the night sky. Her fingers twitch, as the urge to open the window grows strong...

And along with it, the urge to jump.

It's a fleeting sensation, one she's become accustomed to every now and then. But she never had the guts to go through with it, only passing fantasies whenever the thought crosses her mind.

But now...

Just a little more, she thinks.? Just a little more time.

She counted down the days in her head; the peace treaty, and when the Kurkans are gone. After that, then it could end. All of this will end. Once she brought the royal family of Estia to ruin and shame, then will she be able to rest truly.

Her eyes fluttered shut, imagining the pain and agony she would see on their faces...

Imagining the way the wind would whip through her body when she finally takes a leap.

A light tapping resounded in her silent chambers, and Jennie's eyes snapped open, a frown marred her expression.

Nothing.

She thought it had been a mind trick, but then it happened again, and then again.

Thrice, she thought. It sounded like it was coming from the window.

And so she stood up, and drew closer to the window with cautious steps. Her hand closed in on the lock of it, her fingers flipping them open before she lightly pushed the windowpane open, and let out a gasp of surprise.

She brought a hand up to her mouth to prevent her from alerting anyone else.

"How?!" she gasped at him in surprise, but it came out as a stutter. On the other hand, the person outside, who was perching on top of the tree's branch, only stared at her calmly, playing with a pebble in his hand, tossing it up in the air and catching it with the same hand, as if he was only doing a simple prank.

But Jennie was rather taken aback. This late at night, the security of the royal palace was second to none, and quite difficult to slip past through. Should they be found out, this would surely put them in trouble, and Jongin wouldn't be as forgiving as he was in the garden earlier today.

So lost in her grim thoughts, and at a loss at what to do, she hadn't realized Liam had already moved, jumping from the branch and into her room without permission.

In contrast to his broad body, he moved light and swift on his feet, landing rather gracefully on her balcony. Her breath caught in her throat as she watched him leap off the branch.

"Where do you think you are?!" she hissed quietly, as he straightened up.

"In your room," he stated matter of factly. He thought it odd how she had to ask, when she knew perfectly where he was.

Ignoring her growing protest, he walked into her room, glancing around without shame. Jennie rounded after him, but he only ignored her warnings and complaints.

Once he was done touring her room, he finally turned his attention to Jennie, to whom he gave a soft smile.

"Cute nightgown." he told her, "Is that what you sleep in?" he asked

Forgetting she was in a nightgown, Jennie grabbed the nearest blanket and covered herself with it.

"What are you doing here!?" she hissed in a whisper towards him. She was so surprised by his presence, she couldn't think of anything else to say. It was like her thought had scrambled in her mind, as she felt the blood rush to her face in embarrassment.

"I was curious of something, so here I am." he answered languidly, and she frowned and moved to let him leave. She also thought for a moment of requesting his presence and to officially apply as one of the attendants for tomorrow's banquet, but she was cut off when Liam continued and looked at her seriously...

"Why hadn't you asked for my help?"

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## Chapter 20

### Chapter 20 – Seized by a Dauntless Predator

"..."

Jennie's body suddenly froze. When Jongin carelessly dragged her away from the garden, she could still remember Liam mouth the words

*"Need help?"*

She thought of his underlying intention, whether it was an evil scheme or a political move.

However, in contrast to her complicated thoughts, the man in front of her was quite simple. His intention was pure—in fact, he just wanted to know why she did not ask for his help. His eyes, as though of a curious child, persuaded her to answer.

In a trance, Jennie's lips had started to move. "I..."

After hesitating several times, her prudently chosen words finally came out of her mouth. "Don't you know the reason?"

Among the various rules, laws, etiquette, and political conditions required of a royal princess, he has no clue?? There were numerous other reasons why Ishakan could not help her. As a king, he should've known that.

However, he seemed confused—probably, feigning ignorance.

"I don't know." His calm and relaxed voice resonated. "Kurkans are quite simple. If we hate something, then we say no. If we like it, then we say yes. Simple."

Jennie slowly flickered her eyes to the window.

Through it, the cold wind slowly entered her chamber, making the long curtains swung rhythmically. The dark chamber, with only the two of them inside, was illuminated by the moonlight. If anything, this setting, it reminded her of that night.

That time when she didn't have to think of anything and had only succumbed to her pure instincts.

Thinking of it, her mouth felt dry. Jennie avoided his piercing gaze and said in a stern voice, "Get out."

Liam grinned, not a bit offended of her sending him out. "Alright. If that's your wish."

His nonchalant response brought relief to Jennie—but it didn't last long. For in the next second, her sight rocketed to the ceiling as Liam grabbed her close to his body. Using one hand, he lifted her petite body by supporting her buttocks.

She froze, but hugged Liam's shoulders eventually, afraid to fall. She was in a daze. In an urgent tone, she spoke.

"Put me down!"

As expected, he paid no heed to her orders. Seeing that words alone could not restrain his actions, she struggled to wriggle her body with all her might.

But, how could a frail woman be ever at par with a beast's strength? Instead, Liam effortlessly held her, firmly locking her to her position.

Finding his face amidst her struggle, she was greeted by his two eyes, which glowed of delight. Liam intentionally inched his face closer to her and whispered.

"You told me to get out."

His warm breath touched her lips. He was so close to her that upon a little move, their nose would touch. Jennie hurriedly tilted her head backward and hastily spoke.

"Put... me... down!"

"No."

And with that, Liam crossed the bedroom with rapid and light footsteps and nimbly jumped off the railing, where Jennie had always wanted to leap from but had not even dared to do so.

The king of Kurkans was a fierce being, embodying his savage dominions. Such power and strength, everyone believed that he held no fear of almost everything—not even perturbed of abducting the princess from the palace.

Holding Jennie in his arms, his expression did not once flinch. It was as if he was only holding a feather.

Amidst the night, his figure glided on the ground agile and light, before finally disappearing behind the shadows of the nearby trees...

Even the tight security in the palace had not become a hindrance to him. He drifted through the area and took unpaved roads, which were not accessible for the commoners.

Despite the place swarmed by guards, he easily avoided them. Dainty movements, he made not a single sound—a hunter's characteristic his kind was born with.

The damsel in distress, Liam, thought of screaming so that he would let her go. But thinking twice, she eventually dropped the idea, knowing that she would suffer the most damage once they were discovered together at this time of the night.

She gazed at her surroundings as Liam held her. They swiftly passed by the castle of Estia. She could not imagine that someone could easily breach the palace like this! It seemed ridiculous, imagining herself struggling through the secret passage all this time.

The cool wind ruffled her hair, making tangles. Nights in Estia had always been cold, but despite being in her thin nightgown, Jennie was kept warm by Liam's naturally hot body temperature.

As soon as they stepped out of the palace's perimeter, she felt her heart race fast. Afraid he might feel it, Jennie pressed her hand over her chest. She had always acted tough in front of him, unwilling to appear vulnerable, and she didn't want her heartbeat to give her away.

She internally sighed. She sought recluse in the confines of her room, but it was the source of her anxiety, who came seeking her instead.

Not only that, her supposed to be serene night was now stirred in all ways.

Nervous and excited at the same time, she felt like a child committing a wicked act behind her parent's back.

Soon, they reached the edge of the forest, and Liam put Jennie down to stand on her feet. From a distance, the palace could be seen; its faint sounds reverberating and glowing lights beautiful.

Unlike her well-lit home, the forest was dark. Jennie had to blink her eyes to adjust to the dimness of her surroundings. Liam gazed through her silver hair, faintly shining under the moonlight. The silver hair that represented the Kingdom of Estia.

Then, he bent his neck upwards and spread out his arms in the air. Noticing this, Jennie was dumbfounded, even more so when he flicked his fingers.

What are you doing?? She wanted to ask, when suddenly, a cloak flappingly dropped from the sky. Liam grabbed it effortlessly.

With this bizarre scenario flashing before her, Jennie widened eyes scrutinized the top of the nearest tree.

Looking up, she squinted, uncaring if her neck would snap at such an uncomfortable angle. But, no matter how she looked, she saw nothing, not even a slight movement.

Hence, she could only assume that someone was hiding in the shadows...

It was then that she felt soft fabric wrapped around her. Liam gently placed his cloak to cocoon Jennie, who was barely dressed in her slightly sheer nightgown and briefly said. "Someone is tailing after me—one of my men. They are called escort knight here in Estia, right?"

On their way here, she didn't sense any hint of an escort knight following them. It seemed that his senses were beyond average.

Jennie covered her hair with a considerable amount of cloth, as it



was her attribute that would likely get attention. She securely tied the ribbon and tightly stretched the hem of the cloak to fully conceal her form. Revealing herself to any onlooker was the last thing she needed.

Only after Liam was certain that Jennie was fully covered did he speak.

"I wanted to tour around the royal metropolis, but I am not exactly knowledgeable of this kingdom. I am just a countryman from the east side of the desert. So I thought it would be nice to see you again...and Estia, of course." He smiled and repeated, "Of course."

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On top of displaying a perplexing behavior, it was a lame excuse.

"If that is the reason why you came here, I must say you are indeed dauntless."

"Indeed, I am. I even entered the enemy's quarter. But you were courageous too, you know. You do daring things, and you seem accustomed to going out." He made sure to slur the last words.

"There are things that should be kept in private, you know." Jennie fidgeted with the hem of her cloak as she talked under her breath.

"The welcome conference for the Kurkans will be tomorrow," she blurted out.

Sensing her unease, Liam's eyes narrowed into the shape of a half moon. "I will let you go back before the sun rises. Until then, you should hang out with me."

Obliged and dragged by Liam, Jennie headed to the downtown.

At first, she walked reluctantly. Nonetheless, her pace slowly increased as she started loitering in the area. The eyes that only looked down the road now gleamingly roamed along the sights in the street.

It was her first time to be outside without any objective in mind. It felt unfamiliar and awkward, wandering around for pleasure's sake.

Like a giddy child, Jennie manically snooped around. She unconsciously followed the delicious smell of food, leading her to the street food vendor. As she approached the food stall, she stepped back, startled.

Temptation in the form of glazed, skewered meatballs bombarded her senses. She didn't expect this kind of attack tonight. Slowly, she willed herself to keep a distance, ignoring its tenacious appetizing smell.

On the other hand, the king of Kurkans stood with his arms crossed.

In contrast to forcefully dragging her with him to the town, he left her alone when they reached the town square, giving her the liberty to take in everything by herself, unrestricted.

Patiently, he only observed her from afar, but he had not once tore his sharp gaze from her.

Jennie was deeply engrossed in her bustling environment when Ishakan Liam something in front of her, making her freeze in her place.

It was the skewered meatball she had been ogling at a while ago! It was minced pork squeezed into a ball and threaded into a skewer. While being grilled, the appetizing savory smell diffused into the air. The sauce was sprinkled on its top, making her salivate the more.

"Eat this."

"Didn't we agree that you will take whatever I give?"

She drooled. It was because she had not eaten anything at all today. Her stomach grumbled at the sight.

However, she remembered she had to wear a tight dress in front of Cerdina tomorrow morning. She wondered if she made a mistake in eating the dates.

She wanted to refuse, but the temptation was intense. Even if she closed her eyes and turned her head to the side, she couldn't resist it.

Maybe only one bite...

So, she carefully took the skewer to her mouth. As she bit the soft meat, the grilled golden surface tore apart, from which juices oozed.

The moment she tasted it, she couldn't stop herself from eating more.

"Is Estia's royal family poor? I think just selling one painting would be enough to feed you for months."

Liam muttered, but Jennie did not hear any of his words. Instead, she gobbled on her food, focused.

Soon, she came back to her sense, and was shocked at the savage deed she just committed.

I finished the whole skewer!

A sense of shame engulfed her. She couldn't believe she didn't exercise self-control—eating the whole skewer by herself! On top of that, she acted like a beggar that had been given alms.

Liam grinned as she saw Jennie bear such a devastated look on her face, while all the savory sauce was still smudged all over her mouth.

"You don't need to make a face that looks like the world has just fallen on you."

"But, I need to wear a dress tomorrow..."

She nibbled her lower lip, agitated. Liam extended his hands, and his coarse fingertips rubbed her lips.

"Don't bite your lips. It will go to waste." He wiped off the remaining sauce from her mouth and tasted it. The way he licked his tongue was so natural and...sensual that Jennie was at lost on how to react.

Realizing it too late, she shrieked with her innermost thoughts. She could not believe that Ishakan broke all the proper decorum she learned since birth.

"Eating only one skewer wouldn't affect your figure. You are so thin!" Liam took the emptied skewer from her and indifferently uttered a word.

"It's alright."

"...."

His words stuck in her head. Jennie clenched the hem of her sleeves as she said. "I need to know why you are doing this to me."

How could he say it's not a big deal? It was against the order and rules that she had been abiding throughout her life.

Fear. She felt wary of him—an intruder who intentionally trespassed the border. Jennie had never been short of warning. At this moment, she was a hedgehog covered in spines, which warned the predator lurking near.

"Are you sympathizing with me? Or you just need another one-night stand—" She was not able to finish her words because Liam burst into laughter. He laughed as if he heard a hilarious joke.

"One-night stand? Are you anticipating that? I didn't think... Ah, I was so naive..."

He is far from being naive, Jennie scowled.

The word does not suit him at all.

Then, he added a shameless question. "One-night stand... Do you want another one?"

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## Chapter 21

### Chapter 21 – An Unfortunate Encounter

Jennie opened her mouth, and closed it back up again, unable to think of anything to say. She didn't know how or why their conversation had steered that course, but Liam was treating it as if he only found another partner in bed.

Despite her flushed face, Liam only narrowed his eyes, looking at her contemplatively.

"Do you wish to do it once more?" he asked, and looked around, before turning it back to her, "I'm fine with doing it outside." he shrugged and Jennie stared at him, mouth agape, as she was dumbfounded.

Sex outdoors!?? she yelled in her thoughts. It was like she was slapped in the face by how bewildered she was with Ishakan's crazy thinking.

It was an outrageous notion!

Not waiting for her to get over her shock, Liam only grabbed ahold of her wrist and began to drag her behind him. She felt like she was in a daze, reaching an alley.

Light, from the main road, seeped along the walls. It was quiet, and despite being obviously deserted, there were still a couple of people passing by every now and then. Jennie brought her hands around herself, before finally finding her voice.

"Not here!" she hissed at him, but she didn't try to stop him from coming closer. His face was suddenly so close, she could feel his breath hit her face. He drew closer, and spoke in a quiet tone. His intense gaze was focused solely on her.

"You..." he trailed off, his husky tone sending chills down her spine. In her gut pooled a mixture of tension and nervousness. She hadn't realized she brought her two hands in front of her, clasping them together.

"Don't be scared." he told her, her eyes drifting down to his lips, watching the way it moved as he spoke, "You can speak freely around me." he drew even closer, until his lips was right next to her ear, "You don't have to act like a princess when it's just us." He whispered, nodding at her as he recalled what had transpired in the palace gardens, encouraging her to speak her mind.

Soon the tension built inside her settled down, and was replaced with a myriad of jumbled sensations.

I don't have to act like a princess...? she thought wistfully. Never before had she heard such words addressed to her in all her life. She had strived to be the perfect princess in every way, and those words just crashed her walls down. Not even the Countess Melissa, who had been with her since she was just a child, had told her such words.

Overwhelmed by her mixed feelings, she finally let out a deep breath.

"Are you out of your mind!?" she exclaimed in a whisper, but Liam didn't seem to be bothered by her reaction.

"Well, the princess who beautifully grew up is indeed special." he gave her a roguish grin, teasing her. And Jennie shook her head at him incredulously.

"In this situation, you truly are insane."

Liam is the first person in her life who dared suggest ridiculous things in front of Jennie. This stranger from the desert was indeed making her feel a lot of things she wasn't used to before. Jennie let out a frustrated sigh and opted to keep her mouth shut.

Silence soon fell between them. And during their silence, Jennie could only blink at the dim light. Despite calling Liam insane, she too could feel herself going crazy.

Amidst the silence, she slowly closed and opened her eyes. Even though she called Liam crazy, Jennie herself is going nuts at this very moment, too.

He truly is a dangerous person—someone not to be involved with. She thought grimly. "The king of the enemies with an unidentified

purpose.

But Jennie was still curious about Liam, and seeing no other way to quench her curiosity, she opened her mouth to speak.

"You-" but she was quickly cut off by the sound of boisterous laughter, and booming music that was reverberating in the alleyway. Her curiosity shifting towards the noise, she pushed Liam aside to look out, and saw a band of Gypsies dancing about in the alley.

Their laughter too had caught Liam's attention, who had mirrored Jennie's actions, before muttering under his breath. "Tomaris." he grunts and Jennie looks at him in confusion, "You people might know them as Gypsies." he clarifies for her as he continues to observe them, "I don't like them much really." he admits.

Like most people in the continent, Kurkans steer clear of Gypsies. After all, they never settle in one place for long, and do the odd job or two to make a living. Their jobs range from selling handicrafts, to luring people in ridiculous astrological myth, singing, dancing, and so on.

But even more so is the blatant prostitution that occurs whenever Gypsies band together, which only serves to endanger public security and peace. But despite their negative reputation, they still existed because some people do keep them running.

However, there are also some who are well-versed in the art of sorcery. And because of this, more often than not, wealthy merchants, and even the nobles, would secretly seek out their services, buying love potions, or cursed dolls, and would pay them in securing their safety and livelihood.

There also stemmed the old warning, that when one would mess with Gypsies, bad things will come. Hence most people turn a blind eye to their lawlessness.

Such a troublesome group indeed.

"They're like weeds," he grumbled, "No matter how hard you pluck them out, more of them keeps popping out." he let out a defeated

sigh, "I'm not in the mood anymore." he said in a distasteful frown, before turning towards Jennie, and pulled her close to him once more.

"Do you think we can pick up from where we left off?" he asked her teasingly, but hacks couldn't find the words to reply to him with. He chuckled at her speechlessness, until they heard someone calling for him urgently.

"Liam!"

It was a whisper.

"Liam!" it repeated.

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Looking up at the source of the voice, Jennie gasped in surprise. For hidden in the shadows, was a man, who had his head poking out and looking at them.

He was a slender man with a lean build, and his stare was as sharp as a cat's. He hurriedly made his way towards them, and gestured quickly to the alley before disappearing once more.

Frowning, Liam went back outside to see what was happening. Jennie felt her heart sink as she followed him out.

There was a middle-aged man, flirting with some of the Gypsies. Behind him were knights, dressed in casual clothes, watching dutifully as he laughed in amusement with the Gypsies. Jennie's eyes narrowed as she saw who the man was.

It was her fiance, Seokjin.

"Amazing," Liam mused, "Isn't that Seokjin?" he asked her, leaning in further onto Jennie's damp hat, while she had barely fixed the hem of her cloak.

It was a well-known fact that Jin was quite fond of any form of entertainment. Whenever he would wander into the West's Royal District, he, without fail, would head straight first to the red light district, whose alleys were filled with alcohol and women.



However, she had not expected to see him today.

Jennie hopes none of his knights would notice them, allowing them to slip away with ease. But it seemed that would not happen, for his knights had already spotted them. She caught them glancing to one another, watching their in their peripherals.

One of his knights drew closer to him, whispering softly.

And Seokjin's grip on the woman gypsie's waist loosened up, his grin turned into a frown as he shifted his gaze towards them.

Unlike Jennie, who was clearly covered and well-disguised. Liam was not.

They couldn't run. They'd surely be caught.

Jennie finds herself in a difficult situation. She hadn't anticipated sneaking out of the castle late at night would turn dangerous. Her worst case scenario involved being caught by some of the guards of the Royal family, but not this.

"It's too late if we run for it now." Liam calmly told her, which was a clear contrast to the panic she was feeling at this very moment. She looked at him desperately, watching as his eyes glinted dangerously as at the nearing figures. It was clear to her, he had no intention of running away.

Suddenly she was reminded of the Kurkan's hostile nature. And the man in front of her was their leader.

As if reading the Kurkan's mind, the knights simultaneously grasped the hilts of their swords as they neared him, Seokjin's leading the entourage. He stopped in front of them.

"What's this? A Kurkan?" he asked mockingly, and Jennie watched her fiance, dumbfounded. He spoke so casually to the king. But aside from Jennie, no one was surprised with the way he addressed him. But instead of retaliating, Liam only stared him down.

Now Jin wasn't short by any nature, but in front of Liam, he might as well be. And because of his inferiority, Jin compensates in his actions, acting tougher than he actually is.

"Are you out of your mind? You must be! Wandering carelessly inside the palace walls." Jin remarked and Liam snorted.

"What's wrong? I mean no harm. I can wander as carelessly as I want." he replied with quick wit. Jin huffed out in displeasure, stopping short of retaliating when he caught sight of Jennie, hidden behind Liam.

He quirked up a brow towards her, staring at her up and down, before zeroing in on her neatly trimmed nails.

"Where'd you find that woman?" he scoffed, "She's so... small and thin. I imagine she won't look so appealing."

That was when Jennie realized he must have mistook her for a prostitute. Which was a relief. Quickly she hid her hands beneath her cloak, careful not to blow her cover. Jin barked out a laugh when she hid her fingers from view, and turned back to Liam.

"You must like my fiance." Jin said tauntingly, "Is that why you chose her?" he looked at Jennie, "Oh well, I may not know where you got her, but would you like me to give you some recommendations? I know quite a few who have some striking resemblance to her." he boasted, thinking he was doing him a favor but Liam only snorted in amusement.

Jin thought he's one up the King of Kurkans simply because he was the one engaged to Jennie. What a fool.

"To compensate for your origin of a barbaric tribe, I can allow you a taste of such advanced culture we have here in the Royal Kingdom." He proudly stated, "Consider it a favor from me." he winked, chuckling in pride, and his knights follow in suit.

But Liam remained unmoved and unflinching, and only gave them a brief smirk.

"It seems you're the one who's mistaken Seokjin." Liam said in mocking disappointment, and the laughter stopped as the grin was once again wiped on his face.

"Me? Mistaken? Of you flirting with a princess-look-alike prostitute?!"

he asked incredulously and Liam shrugged.

"I am the one playing the role of a prostitute here." he simply stated.

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## Chapter 22

### Chapter 22 – Thrill of the Kill

Seokjin only stared blankly at her. Jennie tried to shrug it off, repressing the rising laughter in her throat, taking deep breaths and releasing them slowly.

She was fully aware that Jin was the type of man who gets lost easily. But the image in front of her currently was beyond her expectations. She struggled to try and contain the bubbling laughter as she looked at Seokjin, his mouth agape, stuttering with incredulity.

"Wha-what!?" he sputtered indignantly. Ishakan cluck his tongue, hating the fact he needed to repeat himself, but did so anyway.

"I told you, I'm playing the role of a prostitute. Does your hard of hearing comes with your old age?" he rebutted, and Seokjin looked absolutely gobsmacked.

"How dare you, you filthy thing!"

"How about you take care of your health first before taking on a younger bride? This is a serious matter to be worried about." Liam smirked slightly at Seokjin's paling face, before completely turning red with anger. And that drove the nail to the coffin, as it completely drove the wedge between them.

"Have you no shame?!"

Jennie watched on the sidelines, completely amused by the events unfolding in front of her. The more this was going on, the harder she had to try to repress the bubbling laughter from releasing. She even had to turn around to prevent herself from laughing out loud.

Across from her, she could see that the opposite were true of the Gypsies. They huddled close together, shoulders hunching in on themselves.

They were clearly afraid.

Following the line of sight of the Gypsies, she saw them looking frightfully at Liam. She could see them mouthing some words to each other, and upon a closer look, it seemed to resemble "Kurkans".

As the Gypsies continued on whispering, some caught sight of Jennie looking at them. Nudging their companion, they then turned their gaze to Jennie, before quieting down. But she could see they were still whispering, just making sure she wouldn't be able to read their lips.

Jennie wasn't the only one that's noticed though.

Liam's gaze flitted around the area, before narrowing towards the Gypsies. He quirked up an eyebrow, before moving to the side, and directed Jennie to move behind him. She did so willingly, taking refuge behind his broad back.

Upon seeing this, Seokjin became even more furious.

"I had tried to send you off nicely, but now you're only asking for trouble!"

Suddenly Seokjin's knights stepped forward, brandishing their swords. The onlookers began to scream in fright, and scrambled away without a second longer. Meanwhile, Jennie bit her lip as she watched the events spiral out of control.

To the outside eye, it would seem like these events were only the result of a sudden burst of rage, but she knew for a fact that was not true. All this was a premeditated act, one put on just for show.

For Seokjin knew that his position and power all stemmed from one fact alone: the ongoing war with the Kurkans. In his desperation to retain his power and control, he devised a plan that would undoubtedly ensue chaos and destroy the peace treaty.

Should the King of Kurkans raise his blade against him within Estia's kingdom, then it could topple every effort made to maintain the treaty.

Liam and Jin knew what it meant, the inside story. But despite knowing Jin does have an underlying motive, Liam was not one to cower in front of a challenge. He wasn't about to back down.

He barked out a laughter, mocking them as they held up their swords against him and gave Jin a smug grin.

"You think this is all that would take to defeat me?" he asked, even his eyes held a clear sense of victory. "Answer me, do you think this would be enough?" he demanded.

Jennie felt her skin prickle, and goosebumps run down her spine as she watched the Kurkan King. He was a wild spirit. She felt herself stumble, and sense someone was behind her. When she turned to look, she let out a gasp as she realized he was a familiar face.

It was the man from a while ago, the one that suddenly appeared in the alley. Here he was, bending one knee in front of her, like he would when he'd pay homage to someone he dearly respected, and softly whispered.

"Your Highness, Liam and Jin will take quite longer to finish, will you humbly accept my services?" he asked her in a whisper. He was hinting that any moment now, the two men might break out in a fight, and Jennie didn't want to get caught up in the crossfire, so she gave him a short nod.

He sharply gestured to her to follow him towards the alleyway. Jennie had gone as far as two steps away, before the knights began to lunge towards Liam. At the sound of swords clanging, people let out screams, scrambling away and towards the shelter of their houses.

Jennie had tried to look back to watch, but an insistent hand kept her moving.

"It's too dangerous to stop and look, Your Highness. We must keep moving!" He urged, "Quickly now!"

As much as he wanted to flee and bring her to safety with him, within a few blocks from the fight, Jennie couldn't help but stop. Her curiosity got the best of her, and turned to see how the fight was progressing.

When he realized she was no longer following, he turned around and bit back a curse as he saw her standing idly to watch.

"No!" He exclaimed and quickly reached her, "Please, if you stay we'll

be in trouble!" He pleaded, "I'll be dead!"

But his pleas fell on deaf ears. Jennie was too mesmerized in the fight, watching how the knights were quickly overpowered by Liam. She had heard of the might of Kurkans, but she never witnessed it like this.

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She wanted to draw nearer, but the blood soaked streets made her stop.

Her knees turned jelly, and the metallic scent of blood wafted in her nose, overwhelming her as it came in all four directions.

Liam moved swiftly and gracefully, so much so they had trouble keeping up with him. He came up behind one of the knights, the one that was chasing after Jennie, and broke his neck rather quickly before slashing at another who was nearby.

He quickly ducked, avoiding the knight coming up from behind, and grabbed his arm, flipping him over, and pinning him down. Suddenly a loud shrill was heard as a bone cracked, and then he moved on the other.

Blood dripped from his fingers, but before a drop could even hit the floor, he'd already struck dead another knight, splattering even more blood. One by one the knights went down, until they'd all been wiped out, annihilated by their supposed prey. They were outmatched by the King of Kurkans.

And by the glint in Liam's golden eyes, he was clearly enjoying the thrill of the kill.

Jennie watched it all, a hand over her mouth as she tried to muffle the gasp of amazement. It spread an exhilarating thrill through her body. Kurkans were said to have possessed physical abilities greater than that of a normal person, but she didn't expect they'd be this strong.

The king barely even broke a sweat, his breathing remaining even despite the number of men he had been fighting against him. Not a

scratch was made on his body, but he was bathed in the blood of the knights Seokjin brought with him.

Suddenly, Jennie had thought about the knights of Estia. Because they had been living in peace for so long, they hadn't bothered to polish up either skills or weapons. They could never hope to go up against the might of the Kurkans.

Should war break out, she would possibly be forced on her knees, begging Seokjin for their lives. And should that happen, Estia would be at Jin's mercy.

As realization dawned upon her, Jennie shook out of her thoughts as the grim atmosphere washed over her.

Estia's last hope lies with the peace treaty. They should quickly seal it with the Kurkans without further delay.

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Tonight seemed much longer than the previous ones.

Jongin stood beneath the night sky, taking in a deep breath of the chilly air as he looked up to the darkened skies. With the moon lighting its usual silver hue, it painted the sky with a faint light, reminding him of someone.

Despite knowing they had roughly the same color, he couldn't help but feel her hair held a uniqueness only to him. It didn't matter how hard he tried to find it in something else, he could never achieve it.

His eyes remained glued to the moon, watching it until clouds rolled by and covering its light. He dropped his gaze, slowly lifting the cup of wine to his eye level as he watched the dark liquid swish and swirl, before bringing it up to his lips and downed it in one gulp until not even a single drop was left.

Seeing he finished it, Jongin set it aside

"Jongin." He heard a soft voice call out from behind him, and he turned to look.

"Mother," he acknowledged. But whereas her expression was soft and



smiling, full of love for her only son by blood, Jongin's face was nothing but devoid of emotion. He only blinked at her, not even offering a smile in return.

Such a cold reaction, but Cerdina did not mind.

"Have you finished?" she asked him, and he only thrust the empty glass towards her. Cerdina stared at the empty goblet, and fixed her shawl, pulling it over her shoulders, before speaking once more.

"We'll catch a cold out here, let's come inside," She told him, but Jongin did not move. He only remained in his spot, leaning over the rails, as he continued to stare at her. Soon the clouds left the moon, finally revealing its light once more.

The light reflected Jongin's silvery locks, creating a wonderful shine.

Silver hair, the mark of one meant for the throne. So extraordinary it was, it sparkled beneath the moonlight. Looking admiringly at her son, Cerdina held his stare with a soft smile.

As if sensing where she was looking at, Jongin ran his hand through his hair.

"What happens when the peace treaty is amended?" He asked, holding her warm gaze with a cold and calculating look. "Will Jin and Jennie's marriage happen then?"

Cerdina only gave a knowing smile, stepping towards him steadily, and cupped his cheek gently, "When you become king," she started, the wind carrying her voice. "When that happens, then everything you want, everything in this kingdom will be yours, Your Highness."

Jongin gave her a brief smile, in his nervousness, he moved his arm, effectively knocking off the empty glass, which crashed into shattered pieces when it hit the rocky terrain. Cerdina watched as the pieces scattered all over, before moving her gaze back to him.

"Mine?" he asks, "Not striking Seokjin's?" He could feel the rage bubbling up inside him, but Cerdina had expected this.

Her smile was still present, ever so soft and pleasant to the eyes. Her

red lips remained as it had been when she first entered Jongin's place.

"Oh my lovely son," She cooed at him, smiling like she was an angel, but Jongin kept his glare at her, full of hatred and contempt. Cerdina only gave him a bright smile.

"Worry not about anything, I shall take care of everything."

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## Chapter 23

### Chapter 23 – Bribery

Fortunately, last night's incident went largely unnoticed. Jennie woke up that morning, feeling quite refreshed after the thrilling experience of going out once more.

The preparations for today's conference had begun early in the morning. Servants rushed about to make sure everything and anything would run smoothly. Jennie had only a piece of a cookie for breakfast, glazed with honey, and a bread dipped with wine.

Others may find it a measly meal, but for Jennie it was more than enough. She even purposefully ate more than she would in order to prevent any accidents such as fainting due to lack of energy from the marching that would happen today.

Once she finished putting on her undergarments, the maids soon set out to prepare the rest of her outfit for the ceremony. They followed her dutifully to assist any preparation she would need.

As they prepared her dress, Jennie sat leisurely on her vanity, scattered documents littered in front of her as she read through what she missed the day before, and one of the maids handed her her quill, and placed the ink bottle in a neat place on her table.

Another drew near, holding a brush and powder.

"My lady, your face please." they requested, but Jennie only continued on reading, which was contrary to the request. Carefully, as to not spill the ink all over, she dipped her quill to the ink as she carefully wrote down, and browsed through even more of the documents.

Despite barely catching sleep, she did not feel exhausted. In fact, she felt as if she was sharper now, more attentive to details, and not much was left forgotten. Although, events of yesterday did keep running through her thoughts.

It was undisputed that Jin did an excellent job in keeping the

Kurkans at bay in the west, but many things have changed since then. Because of the war for the throne, the Kurkan's forces were halved.

Most of the long war was because of an internal struggle, so when Liam came, and killed the current king before taking the throne himself, it ended rather quickly.

When Liam had ascended the throne, he immediately summoned the countless tribes of Kurkans, and swore them to his allegiance. And thus the real Mater of the Desert was born.

Jennie dropped her gaze, so deep in thought.

If I were the new King of Kurkans, what will I do in this kind of situation?? Will harmonizing the scattered tribes at once be the simplest and easiest way to unite the nation?

But no matter what the question, she could only find one answer. There must be an enemy.

It was most likely that the Kurkans were only feigning their interest in making the peace treaty, with an ulterior motive to create a war. This current visit could just be a ruse, a way to scope out the competition.

And Jin does not want peace with the Kurkans, either.

It seemed that in all the kingdoms involved, Estia was the only one who truly wanted the peace treaty to fall through. Jennie tilted her head, turning slightly and called out in a hushed tone as she recalled last night's events.

"Countess." she said, and Melissa, who had been brushing her hair softly, had paused. She looked up and stared at the mirror, meeting Jennie's gaze. "Please contact Count Valtein, tell him I wish to meet him later in the conference." she ordered and Melissa nodded.

"Should I tell him to meet you outside of the conference?" Jennie gave a terse nod, and Melissa gave a slight curtsy. "Then I shall tell Baroness Cinael to relay the message."

"Thank you." Jennie said.

Countess Melissa finished a few more touch ups before leaving to do as was requested, but not before reminding the maids that remained to finish getting her ready. When the Countess was gone, Jennie picked up a brooch, with stones of diamond and amethyst.

She watched as Countess Melissa approached Baroness Cinael from her mirror. The baroness, she noticed, was deeply vexed. She watched as they conversed, before finally giving her attention on the documents before her once more.

Cerdina will look for her soon, but before that, she wished to remain in her thoughts as she kept a watchful eye on the preparations for the conference. They needed something to dangle for the Kurkans to willingly go into a treaty.

One, that not even the King of Kurkans, could ever refuse.

Her grip on the quill tightened in the thought as she scribbled another signature.

"Princess?" Jennie looked up and quirked an eyebrow

"What is it?" she asked, and the maid flushed before dropping her gaze.

"There's nothing my Lady." Jennie kept her gaze on the maid, before returning back to the documents after discerning nothing was wrong. But when she moved to write, she found her hands frozen, and Liam's golden eyes flashed through her mind as if he was currently looking at her.

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Liam let out a puff of smoke as he blew from a leaf cigarette, staring blankly outside. There was a cool, yet faint sweet scent wafting through the room. As he continued smoking, he watched as wisps of the smoke clung around his torso, before dissipating.

He blew out yet another puff of smoke.

He was still dressed, and watched as the colorful fabrics, which decorated his skin, were removed one by one. When that was done,

his jewels soon followed suit.

When his servants had finished picking out the best clothes for his wardrobe next, they began dressing him once more.

His torso was left uncovered for the following events that would occur, but the servants dressing him had wandering eyes, raking over his bare skin, marvelling at the smooth, unblemished flesh, free of any tattoos.

Yet, he felt none of those hungry gazes—his mind was too filled with the thoughts of the petite woman with the silver hair...

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Watching the servants in silence, was a woman, whose hair made it look like her head was bigger than the rest. She carefully sidestepped the array of servants, before holding out an ashtray for her king, to which Liam effectively dropped the growing ash from his cigarette.

"Genin," he acknowledged, "Where's Haban?"

"He's scoping out the conference hall." She answered. "He told me he wanted to make up for last night's little skirmish." Her tone was haughty as she spoke bluntly to him. It might have sounded like she was defending Haban, but Liam knew better as he shook out more ash, and blew out another puff of smoke.

Last night, Princess Jennie had witnessed a glimpse of a Kurkan's true nature. He would have preferred if she did not—she didn't need to see it.

Certainly, it would have been better if Haban had managed to get her away before the events occurred, but Liam was thinking perhaps it was another factor that couldn't be avoided in that circumstance.

"What can I do then?" he asked her, "I was born like this, I couldn't hide it for the rest of my life."

"I know, but—"

"And I'm not one who's easily frightened either," he continued, cutting her off, before letting out a fond smile, "Do you know how brave she was? Instead of being frightened and scared, she's working

hard, worrying about last night."

Liam then let out a sigh, "I don't know how to use her to our advantage in the negotiation." He admitted as he discarded the cigarette, placing it on the ashtray as he put on his robes. "She was always like that, so devoid of fear."

His unruly brown locks were then slicked back as they were combed over, clearing out any obstacle to reveal his sharp eyes and forehead. The collared garment was engraved with colorful embroidery embedded with gold threads. The servants thoroughly filled the small buttons one by one in a row and trimmed them neatly so that there were no wrinkles on the cloth.

"Once the negotiations begin, I think the most problematic part will be the princess since she is the core of the royal family." He fretted.

"But the negotiation is just an excuse, right?"

"Yes...but..."

Liam held the leaf tobacco in his hands again once more, hovering it close to his mouth. She's one of the many reasons why he came to Estia. But it seems that Jennie is becoming more and more the priority than anything else. Liam sighed and puffed up smoke, lost in his thoughts.

"But it keeps on bothering me." He finished softly.

Genin didn't know whom Liam was referring to, but she could fully understand. Genin blinked as she asked a question.

"Aren't you here to repay her kindness? Do you have an interest in her?" She finally asked, and instead of receiving a reply, Liam only offered her a smirk, which gave Genin a clear picture on what he was planning.

"You're making her your bride." She stated, and Liam let out a bark of laughter.

The idea itself was absurd.

"You think too much as a Kurkan. You must keep in mind, she's an Estian."

"Why should that matter?"

Liam lets out a sigh. "Just don't look at it from a Kurkan's perspective."

At the statement, Genin's brows furrowed in thought, and soon fell silent, before finding her voice once more.

"It'll be a difficult path." She told him in reply.

Indeed, it was a hard thing for Genin to understand. After all, she got married to her husband when they held her captive, which was the Kurkan way. And for the Kurkans, it didn't matter that Jennie was already betrothed to Seokjin.

Liam took his time to formulate a reply as he chose what accessories he would be wearing for the day, particularly the only around his neck.

"One step at a time," he told her, "And let's begin with today's banquet." Genin nodded in acceptance before looking over the jewelries as well.

"The one on the right looks like it would suit you better." She supplied helpfully, and Liam nodded.

He picked up the necklace, the one with a fiery red ruby as its centerpiece. The door then burst open, as a Kurkan servant came in and stopped shortly behind them.

"Your Majesty, he's arrived." The servant told them and Liam straightened up.

The person they've been waiting for finally arrived. Liam received the hand mirror another servant handed over to him and checked his nape.

"Let him in." He ordered, and the servant quickly obeyed, leaving the room once more. The next time the door opened, a middle-aged man entered.

His attire was fit for the banquet. Despite it being modelled largely after the latest Estian style, he would undoubtedly stand out in the crowd, even those of Kurkans.



He had a confident aura around him as he stood up straight and tall. But despite his bravado, he couldn't hide the cold sweat that was beginning to form on his temples. His eyes raked over the room, before stopping at Liam, meeting his golden eyes. He gulped down briefly and stood still.

"I believe this is our first meeting." Liam started and the man gave a terse nod.

"Yes, it's a pleasure to finally meet the King of Kurkans." The man responded. Liam beamed at him despite the late greeting.

"Please, don't be nervous," He said, "I don't bite."  
The man only let out a light laugh before silence reigned once more. He didn't know how else to respond to the slight tease.

"Indeed, Kurkans don't eat humans." Genin added with a genuine smile, and though it was meant to put the man at ease, he was still not. Genin moved back as Liam came forward to finally shake the man's hand, before gesturing to the nearby chair.

"Please sit," Liam offers, "We have much to discuss." He added, but the man did not move, and was still resolutely standing.

"I won't say anything that would bring harm to Estia." He already clarified as Liam observed him.

This one's not so easily fooled, I see.? Liam thought.

Is this why Jennie keeps him around? She's got a good sense of people, I'll admit. He mused to himself before letting out a light chuckle.

"And you won't need to," he reassured. "But that's not why you're here." He signalled his servants, and one of them moves to bring out a box that was placed by the corner, before bringing it closer to the two men, presenting it between them.

The man did not want anything to do with what the box contained, but when the servant opened it up, his eyes widened as he saw what was inside. Seeing his reaction, Liam moved to his side, whispering right next to his ear...

"All I want," he began to utter, "Is to get close to you," Liam pulled away as the man looked at him warily, "Count Valtein."

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## Chapter 24

### Chapter 24 – Priceless Gift

Once the guest began piling in, everyone was amazed by the extravagance of the banquet that had been prepared for the Kurkans. On the tables were an array of many wines and delicacies of Estia, even the decorations were a work of art. It almost seemed like Estia wanted to make a statement, to showcase everything they have and can offer to their allies.

And while the many nobles appeared to be enjoying the magnificent feast, Jennie was not.

Despite being in charge of the preparations, and she should be happy everything had gone rather smoothly, she was exhausted. Just thinking about the week long conference is making her less and less thrilled by the moment. She wanted it to be over.

With a blank expression, Jennie dragged her feet under her, forcing her to attend the conference. The hem of her dress, which was cream-colored, dragged over the polished marble floor along with her. As she walked through the hallway, in a still dignified manner despite her exhaustion, she could feel the lingering stares at the back of her head, along with faint murmurings surrounding her.

She could hazard a guess as to why.

It was obviously because of the King of Kurkans, Liam. He had made an impression to the public, clearly displaying his interest in her. It fueled the gossip around the palace, its people. Some of the rumours were even malicious in nature, about the barbaric king and his relationship with a beautiful princess.

As the rumours spread, facts and the truth became distorted, even going as far as thinking there was a secret child between them.

Jennie could scoff at them. Ridiculous.

Even Seokjin, who heard these rumours, became enraged. He tried

his best to nip the rumours in the bud before it even spread further, but Jennie couldn't be bothered to lift a finger. They were after all, just rumours in the end.

People only listen to what they want to hear, never mind the awful truth. Since she no longer possessed her so-called dignity that she should have protected, making Seokjin angry was at least worth it.

It served its purpose.

She glanced at the banquet hall.

Not a Kurkan was still in sight. And because of their political pride, not even the royals of Estia would make an appearance before their arrival.

The reason Jennie had been there first, was because it was her duty to greet the guests and welcome them. It was also a good excuse. It was better to be there, than to have to mingle with Cerdina and Jongjin. It was an unbearable thought.

When she finished greeting everyone, she quickly searched around for Count Valtein before greeting any of the other guests. She knew her message had been successfully relayed, so he must be waiting for her already.

There were many that would be willing to back Jennie up when the time came, and one of them was Count Valtein. He was the representative for the Pro-Princess power after all.

Although, Jennie muses power was a bit of an exaggeration. After all, her only use was to be a bartered off bride to the highest bidder. Still, Count Valtein was rather proud to be her confidant. He even served as her eyes and ears.

Because she wasn't allowed to leave the palace, she couldn't move within her wishes just about anywhere. There are even times the Count would visit in secret, to help her tackle the internal issues the palace was facing. Also, it was because of him, she could sneak out of the palace, especially when he opened up the unused irrigation just for her sake.

She wanted to hear about the latest news from him, knowing

whatever information he would have for her, it would be viable. After all, she would need information, one that not even the palace or its highest of social circles were privy to.

Jennie did one more scan around the room, before her eyes finally landed on Count Valtein, who was fast approaching like a child on his way to his present. He practically looked like he was about to jump for joy too if it wasn't for the others around them.

"Princess!" He exclaimed as he saw her. Honestly, it was like they hadn't seen each other for years, when Jennie knows it was otherwise. She gave a nod of acknowledgement, allowing him to calm down, before leading him to a secluded corner in the banquet hall. It was an open space, but private enough to talk.

"What is it?" She asked and Count Valtein breathed out in relief...

"I almost died yesterday," he sulked

"What?" Jennie asked in alarm, before Count Valtein straightened up and smiled at her.

"I met the King of the Kurkans."

Jennie didn't know what to say, but look at the Count with a dumbfounded look. He was making it seem like he was saved from some fox's trap with how much he was making a fuss about it.

"The King sought me out first, mind you," he began, "Like he also wanted to meddle with Estia's internal affairs, I didn't betray any secrets, of course, but he was absolutely convincing and undoubtedly charismatic!" he praised.

He sought out Count Valtein?!? Jennie hadn't expected Liam was gutsy enough to actually do that. She couldn't help but feel the bead of sweat trickle down her temples the more she listened to the Count Valtein tell his story.

"He wanted to win me over, he even gave me a gift!"

"A gift?" Jennie asked, before frowning a bit, "What gift?"

"Ten rolls of silk." he answered in a subdued tone, and Jennie stared

at him with a narrowed stare. The Count began to stutter at her unimpressed look, "It was no ordinary silk, I assure you!" he retracted.

He looks around, before drawing closer, as Jennie does with him with her ear.

"It was purple silk." he whispered reverently, and Jennie pulled back with a shocked expression.

Purple silks were of a priceless value, coveted by many, even in Estia, who wasn't part of the Royal Family. But there weren't many who could easily gain access to it, even if you did have the capacity to attain it.

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## Chapter 25

### Chapter 25 – You Disappoint Me, Princess

Purple dyes were extremely valuable because they were difficult to produce. Even a small number of millionaires could only own just a few pieces of purple silk. Only the royal family of Estia and Seojin of Oberde have enough purple cloth to wear.

It was the ultimate symbol of wealth and power.

Even a small piece of it would be absolutely priceless.

"It was more vivid and beautiful than any other purple silk I've ever seen before." he recalled wistfully. No words could truly describe its magnificence for it would only fall short on describing its perfection. "It's just like your eyes." he added as an afterthought, and Jennie felt the tip of her ears flush from the praise.

But while Jennie tried to fight off her blush, Count Valtein only continued rambling.

"Of course, I rejected the gift. He said it is a gift, but it was not for free, of course. I don't know what he would ask in return for the favor, but I firmly turned him down." he reassured her, his jovial face turned serious. Although, she could see a hint of regret for having to turn down such a magnificent gift.

Count Valtein always liked to dress up. He was always updated with the latest fashion trend in the city and frequented in the dressmaker's shop. He used to be so happy when something he made became so popular. Rejecting Liam's precious gift thereby meant so much for Count Valtein.

"Thank you." Jennie said in a grateful whisper, before Count Valtein shook his head and smiled at her with reassurance.

"Don't say that. I only did what was right." Count Valtein shook off his head as if to rid himself of the yearning for the purple silk. He

continued to speak with a serious face. "Anyway, just as he reached out to me, I wouldn't be surprised if he met other nobles too. You need to be careful." he warned.

Count Valtein's words rang true, but this was only a small portion of the truth.

In their society, Count Valtein was one of a kind. There were plenty more aristocrats and nobles who would've taken the gift with no second thought, and thus, would have been indebted to the Kurkans. For now, all they could do was keep an eye out on whichever noble was uncharacteristically supportive of the Kurkans during the cabinet meeting.

"Kurkans amaze me," Count Valtein continued, "Bribing others with such grandiose objects. I'm sure they can even bribe some with something far more precious than gems or gold." Jennie frowned at him with worry before agreeing.

Still, she had doubts that those ten rolls of purple silk were all they had. The wealth of the Kurkans in the desert was rumoured to be beyond imaginable. For them it might have been a priceless commodity, but for the ones manufacturing the cloth, it would barely make a dent in their supply.

After surmising her thoughts, Jennie turned once more to the Count.

"We also cannot rule out that the Kurkans know how to make this purple silk."

Just as the Count was about to give her his reply, silence fell upon the banquet, as if dousing a fire with a bucket of water. There was a shift in the air, as all eyes fell on the entrance, and not just them both.

Whispers began when they realized who it was that has captivated everyone...

"The barbarians..." Jennie could hear somewhere off the distance as the Kurkans, their honorable guests, had finally made their appearance.



They were all dressed in their traditional robes, it's color dark, a complete contrast to Estia's brightly colored clothes. It was no wonder it captured the attention of many. Despite it being their ceremonial clothes, one could not deny the ferocity in each of their movements.

It was the way they looked, the way they stood, walked and held their chin up high, that they were more than just ordinary humans. And leading the entourage was none other than Liam himself.

Their eyes raked over the banquet hall, reminding Jennie of a predator trespassing on another's territory.

Some of the nobles around couldn't help but flinch when their gaze would land on them.

But the most eye-catching of them all was Ishakan's ceremonial robes. It had the traditional Kurkan-styled collar, its black fabric embroidered with golden threads, one that had never been seen in Estia. But that wasn't the most captivating part.

No.

It was the purple silk that he wore like a sash, stretched across his torso. Ornate patterns littered all over the expanse of the silk, light reflecting off its surface whenever it hit him. Jennie, who had rarely sought out the luxuries of life, couldn't help but covet it as well. She could see now what Count Valtein was wistful about.

The Kurkan's purple silk was a cut above the rest over the entire continent.

So fixated on the silk, she hadn't realized she had been staring until she looked up and met Liam's knowing stare. She held his gaze for a moment before averting her eyes and thought about resuming her conversation with the Count.

As she turned to Count Valtein, she was taken aback by the fierce look he had in his eyes, trailing to someone in front of him.

Is he glaring at Liam?? She wondered. His eyes were staring resolutely in front of them, which prompted her to do the same when

a dark shadow was cast in front of her, which made her choke back a gasp.

Golden eyes looked down on her, a smirk clearly on his face.

"Why do you avoid my gaze?" he asked her, drawing near, "I know you saw me." he told her.

Jennie looked around her nervously, not knowing what to say to him in front of the watchful gazes of so many people. This only made Liam smirk some more as he gently took a hold of her hand.

The nobles nearby had sucked in their breath, some even flinched. Even Count Valtein couldn't believe this show of disrespect as he held his breath...

He dipped his head, bringing up her hand to his mouth and placed a gentle kiss on her pale knuckles.

"You disappoint me, princess." he spoke, as everyone around them watched with bated breaths.

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## Chapter 26

### Chapter 26 – May I have This Dance?

He moved like a seasoned hunter who had his sights set on his prized prey. He waits and goes in for the kill when they least expect it, just like what Liam was doing to Jennie now.

Liam had tied up her hands in a metaphorical sense, and she realized she couldn't escape him easily.

In silent frustration, Jennie bit her lip and tried to pull her hand free from his grasp, but he only tightened his grip in response, before finally letting go when he noticed her erratic breathing.

He couldn't help but frown at the sight, and Jennie finally breathed out in relief.

"I assumed you would be eager to welcome me," Liam continued, "I guess I was wrong."

He drew closer, stopping just a hairbreadth away from her ear and whispered, "Are you angry, princess?"

Jennie shot him a sideways glare.

"People are staring." She replied firmly in a low voice, reminding him of his promise to treat her justly as a princess when in public, and Liam pulled away with a smirk directed at her.

Their entire exchange was being watched by everyone within the vicinity. Eagerly anticipating what would happen next as one would with a play.

Jennie knew she could not afford to lose her cool now. Liam was a barbarian, who didn't know or would care about propriety and manners, so the blame would fall entirely on her shoulders. It would put her in an undesirable position within the court and her people.

She tries to think of an appropriate response, and Count Valtein moved to help her, but the sound of trumpets cut off their

conversation. Its horns blew in a way that let everyone know that the king had finally entered the fray.

When the trumpets cease their sound, the orchestra begins to play a majestic piece as the king marches inside to greet everyone. The nobles too, stop their staring and pay their respects as he passes them by, bowing their heads in a show of reverence and respect, but despite that the tension in the air remained unchanged.

Lingering eyes were still on the King of Kurkans and the Princess of Estia.

And the king was quick to notice, if the way he narrowed his eyes in disapproval were anything to go by.

Just like everyone else, his eyes were drawn to the purple silk sash Liam wore in boastful arrogance before looking away. Even Cerdina and Jongin had been astonished by his sash, but were trying not to let their amazement show.

However, the sash wasn't really Jongin's focus, but rather the physical closeness between Jennie and Liam.

And if Liam noticed his subtle glare, he did not react to it at all. When that proved fruitless, he turned his eyes to Jennie, giving her an icy blue stare as if to say, "Remember your place as Estia's royal princess."

Jennie moved silently, quickly putting a distance between her and Liam, and followed the other royals of Estia as they found their seats. The other three sat down, but the King of Estia remained standing as he gave a welcome speech to him and their esteemed guests.

Jongin took it as an opportunity to move closer and gave Jennie a warning.

"I thought I told you to stop hanging out with those barbarians." he growled softly, looking like he was paying attention to the king's speech. Jennie had hoped she could ignore him too, but found it rather difficult to do so.

"I thought you were smart, sister. What didn't you understand with

that statement?" he continued, "Don't tell me you're in love with that barbaric king?" He scoffed as he took a sip of his goblet, "Are you planning to sell out your country after all?"

"I did not mean to deal with him." She quickly rebutted before sighing out in defeat. She had tried to stop herself from being goaded in to respond, but her emotions got the best of her, as she shot him her best glare. "He's the one who sought me out, I did nothing." She made sure to enunciate every word, "And I can't do anything that would jeopardize the treaty."

"Of course, dear sister." Jongin nodded with a sly smile on his lips, but his eyes were steel, as cold as ice. He felt quite triumphant in squeezing a reaction out of her. He silently gestured for her to resume looking out to their guests, and Jennie did so gladly.

"Then allow me to be your first dance." Jongin offered, still looking ahead, and Jennie straightened up in her seat with a haughty look.

"Apologies, brother," she said in a mocking tone, "But I think that right belongs to my fiancé."

Hearing this, Jongin chuckled dryly... "Don't even think about cheating your way out of this." he reminded her.

She was, by all means, still single, and thus, it was only right that her first dance would be among her family, even in the case of her being engaged. She knew this, but she wanted to keep as much distance between her and Jongin as possible, and dancing with Seokjin would ensure that.

"Now that I think about it, I don't believe I've seen Seokjin." Jennie said as she looked around and Jongin hummed in disinterest.

"As to be expected," he said, "He'll be useless once this whole treaty is over and done with. These barbarians, I'm awaiting their departure." Such remarks only proved to Jennie that Jongin was still clueless to what she was planning for the treaty.

On the other hand, the Kurkans had already begun their move the first step they took into Estia.

Under the guise of the treaty, each and every Kurkan had begun stealing the kingdom's secrets piece by piece, little by little. If this continues on, Estia would be completely defenseless should both the Kurkans, and Seokjin choose to abandon the kingdom.

And here Jongin was, completely confident that the peace treaty will pull through. He never thought that such a possibility would exist, as if certain the peace treaty would go entirely smooth.

Even now, Jennie was still working hard that nothing else would go wrong, and here Jongin was reaping the fruits of her efforts. She clenched her fists tightly in concealed frustration and anger before snapping at him...

"If you want this peace treaty to absolutely to be in our favor, you'd do best to refrain from calling them that demeaning term." she hissed at him, keeping her face pleasant and graceful for the crowd, "Besides, we don't know what the outcome will be, so don't write off Seokjin." she finishes with a huff.

Jongin's eyes narrowed towards her, and for a moment, she was worried he'd openly scold her.

Fortunately, the King has finished his speech, as applause resounded, and both prince and princess schooled their features back to a pleasant expression as they applauded with the crowd.

With the end of his speech, the banquet has officially begun as their guests began to enjoy the feast. Music and dancing filled in the silence, entertaining them all, and Jennie could see some had even managed to ask Kurkans to join them for a dance.

Jennie could feel someone was still staring at her as she got up to walk around, and despite the many eyes, Jennie could immediately spot him even a mile away as he stared at her rather intently. And as much as she was tempted to stare him down, she was determined to not give Jongin any more reason to doubt her intentions.

Only it wasn't just Jongin who got under her skin, but another, who was now making an appearance before her.

"Princess!" A jovial voice greeted her, heard over from the music and laughter in the hall. Jennie held back a groan and paused her steps before turning to greet the man with a bright smile as was expected of her.

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"Kim Seokjin of Oberde," she greeted in acknowledgment, "It's a pleasant sight to see you."

He gave her his own bright grin at her words. So full of confidence he was, and Jennie could see why.

His entire ensemble consists of purple silk, covering him from head to toe. Despite being a rare and expensive clothing, she couldn't help but feel it was such a waste that Seokjin was the one who's wearing it instead of anyone else.

His face was noticeably more flushed so early in the banquet, and the purple color only made him look more ridiculous than he already was. Jennie tries to hold back a grimace at the sight of him.

This is a little rude, Jennie thought as she gave him a once over. He's the very image of greed. She mused before forcing herself to think up a compliment to fit the situation.

"What a pleasant outfit you have." She finally said with a gentle smile, and he only grinned proudly.

"Of course it would be, I made an effort to look presentable to you." He boasted, and Jennie presumes, if given a chance, he would send a matching dress to her at once. Jennie only laughed half-heartedly as last night's events flash through her mind.

Despite all his guards being decimated, Seokjin looked practically unaffected by it. Jennie felt slightly sorry for Liam having to deal with him.

Though if there was anything else that could tell her he was affected by last night, it was with the way he stuck to her like glue, as if to rub it in Liam's face that Jennie was his. Last night's event popped in her mind, and she resists the urge to scowl at the knowledge of prostitutes who looked like her. And then her thoughts turned to the

equally treacherous deeds she had done as well.

"May I have the honor to dance with you?" He finally asked her, offering out a hand for her. Despite the desire to say no, thank you, Jennie has no choice but to accept. After all, in the eyes of the public, Jennie belonged to him.

She took his hand, with expertly concealed distaste, and he surprised her when he removes her hand momentarily and entwines their fingers together. Jennie looked down at their conjoined hands. If holding his hand was difficult now, she loathed to think how she'd feel when the dreaded honeymoon would arrive.

She let out a sigh.

Midway to the end of their dance, the joyful festival music suddenly died down. The chatting stopped soon after, as well as the laughter, and everyone that was already out dancing as a man stood imposingly in front of the engaged couple.

Liam had been waiting for the perfect moment to ambush them. He waited until they pass through him to make his move and stopped right in front of them, extending his hand out in an expecting manner, daring the princess to deny him.

"May I have at least one song, Princess?" he asked with a charming smirk. It was like hearing a pin drop in the silent room as he asked her for her first dance, taking pleasure in disregarding the etiquette of Estia.

Jennie knew he was baiting her, but her customs demand to let her first dance be with either her family members or betrothed. He hadn't even waited for them to even finish when he purposefully stepped in to ask her for one.

Jennie stared blankly at his offered hand, thinking of the many implications of her every response. Deeming her to take too long in answering, Jin threw Liam a scowl, but schooled his features to one of indifference. Perhaps he was shaken by last night's events as he cordially greeted Liam.



"The King of Kurkans." He stated and Liam's hawk-like eyes shift to him.

Seokjin removed his hand from Jennie, and wrapped it protectively around her waist, pulling her closer to him in a show of defiance as he looked up at Liam.

"I apologize, but the princess is my fiancé." He pointed out in a civil tone, and Liam chuckled dryly before his lips turn to a sneer.

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Jin was delighted with the clear distaste he saw on Liam's expression. It felt like he had just dealt a major blow on the Barbarian King's pride! It seemed like the King of Kurkans had grown too complacent with the banquet. In a smug tone, Jin continued to rub the salt in the wound...

"It's customary in Estia, that the princess' first dance would belong to me." He said with a smirk, "I do hope you'd understand." So confident he was, he overlooked a simple fact.

This was no ordinary man he was contending with, but the King of Kurkans. And as king, he was civil enough to let him finish goading him in, but he would have the last laugh.

"Is that so?" He simply quipped, and Seokjin stared at him in confusion, "I thought this whole banquet was supposed to be in our honor?" Liam asked, looking around for emphasis, and Jin could feel his blood simmer in frustration.

"King or not, tradition dictates-" he got cut off, when Liam stepped forward, cutting off his argument. Liam continued to stare him down. The nearby people also watched in rapt attention, waiting for what was going to happen next.

"Is this how Estia treats their esteemed guests?" He asked with a raise of his brow. His tone of voice was low and quiet, but the wind carried it effortlessly.

Even the Kurkans paused in their festivities, watching the heated exchange of their king and their host, shooting death glares at

Seokjin, never mind blinking.

Feeling their glares at the back of his head, Seokjin could feel the stifling atmosphere that was filling up the space. Other nobles were wise enough to proceed about their activities quietly, wary of their outlandish guests. He could feel the sweat roll down his temples as he attempted to hold his ground.

Liam turned his attention to Jennie... "Princess? What have you got to say?" He asked her with a wide smile.

Sensing she has been backed into a corner, Jennie felt the crowd stare at her, and in resignation, she accepted the dance, placing her hand in his outstretched one. She noted momentarily how warmer than others his hands were to the touch.

Gritting his teeth in silent anger, Seokjin relinquished his hold on her and stepped back, glaring at them both one last time before walking out in fumes.

The crowd parts as Liam and Jennie moved towards the center of the ballroom, and like watching the moon in the night sky, the figure of Jennie's pale complexion and silvery-white hair, flowing smoothly with every move, in contrast to the King's dark brown hair and tanned skin, captivated their gazes.

Even their robes greatly contrasted, yet blended so well, together.

As they began to dance gracefully between the crowd, soon, the nearby nobles eventually returned to their businesses as the boisterous and joyful atmosphere returned.

Despite being so close physically, as Jennie practically hung onto his shoulders as he held onto her waist, the rest of the dance was done in complete silence.

But this silence didn't last long for some of the Kurkans growled at the general direction of the musicians, who, in fear, immediately began playing once more.

It was a music only meant for the two of them.



## Chapter 27

### Chapter 27 – As Red as Blood

At first glance, one would assume that Liam was a poor dancer. However, witnessing him move so gracefully with the music, made Jennie think otherwise. It was as if he was taught how to dance the dance of Estia beforehand. However, Jennie couldn't stop herself from saying...

"It seems you have a knack in attracting trouble." she said, finally breaking the silence between them. As they twirled, Jennie's skirt fluttered around her like a flower blooming before falling gracefully around her feet. At this statement, Liam frowned at her...

"Will you really insist on playing princess when we're dancing?"

She fought the urge to stomp on his foot. But even if she were to put all that she had on that one mighty stomp, she doubts, with his thick skin, that he would sense she was doing it. It was like underneath his skin was his skeleton made of iron. Seeing his grin at her, Jennie couldn't help but snap at him...

"Why do you even insist on causing me trouble every time?" She asked him incredulously and he only grinned at her all the more.

"Probably because it irritates you so much." he said smugly, and Jennie stared at him with a glare.

She was still deciding whether or not he meant it or just making fun of her. Sensing she couldn't get a straight answer, Liam fired away once more with a smug grin...

"Do you like your fiancé? Seokjin?" He asked with mock curiosity as Jennie's frown only deepened the more he grinned at her.

This man, she thinks with irritation, fighting back the growing urge to cause him bodily harm. It was clear now that he was enjoying her predicament.

"My feelings for this matter are irrelevant." She answered

diplomatically, "As a princess, it is my duty to marry him."

"Ah you're too kind, princess." he mock-praised her and drew her closer, whispering to her ear. "Don't you think you should loosen up a little?"

Jennie would have preferred that he was unable to come to Estia, thus not having him around, alas, reality was not that fortunate. Instead of gracing him with an answer, Jennie chose to change the subject instead.

"You dance so well the dance of Estia, how come?" She asked him.

"Ever since I was young, I've had rigorous lessons on what to do on a variety of dances." He answered truthfully, but Jennie watched him with a skeptical eye. She could hardly believe he'd done such a thing since childhood. She couldn't even imagine what childhood he would have had, let alone actually go through dance lessons with his attitude.

"Curious?" he uttered with a grin and held back a snort.

"Not one bit."

"Such an excellent liar."

"Please leave me alone." She sighed out in annoyance, careful to keep her cool. She still needed to keep up appearances after all. Liam's eyes narrowed down to her as he watched her lips begin to tremble, "Why do you always insist-" she says in a choked-up voice before she stopped herself before continuing, and pulled away from him. However, he gripped her tighter, preventing her from doing so.

Liam drew near once more, and asked her in a whisper...

"Do you still wish to die?"

And without hesitation, Jennie firmly replied...

"Yes."

The music stopped, and another one started. Jennie finally managed

to extract herself from Liam, and smiled at him gracefully in false pretense...

"It was a pleasure to dance with you, King of Kurkans."

"The pleasure's all mine, Princess of Estia." The, she curtsied before him.

"If you'll excuse me, I'll go look for my fiancé. Please relax and enjoy yourself at the banquet." Without waiting for a reply, Jennie turned on her heels and walked away from him, effectively cutting off Liam whatever else he had to say.

She felt like she was running away as she walked at a fast pace.

She had to leave as soon as she could because there was only one thing she could think of she'll do if she'd stay any longer. She had a feeling he would offer her his help, and had he done so, she would've accepted it.

She could feel the stares of the crowd following her from the back of her head as she left. It made her want to disappear, the way their gazes swept over her, like a predator eyeing their prey. She only paused when she finally saw the Countess Melissa a few steps in front of her.

"Countess..." She began, but trailed off, and the Countess gave her a soft smile, taking her hand gently, leading her away.

"Princess, perhaps you should rest for a while." She told Jennie, who escorted her to a private resting room. When they were finally in the comfort of the chamber, Jennie found herself collapsing on the long sofa nearest to her. Melissa proceeded to busy herself by fetching her a glass of water and helped to prop her up to sit comfortably.

Jennie could feel her breathing turn ragged, as black spots appeared in her vision, and Melissa moved behind her silently, placing a comforting hand on her shoulder, massaging her gently.

"I should loosen your corset." Melissa told her, but she was stopped.

"No, no need." Jennie interrupted, "I need to go see Seokjin."

She had no doubt she had offended Jin deeply with her accepting Liam's offer to dance. She needed to appease him now, and avoid any other repercussions. Countess Melissa gave her a pitying look, but Jennie only gave her a slight smile.

Despite being called a princess, that's where her privileges stopped. Jennie was as powerless as any other person in the castle compared to the other royalties. Despite that, she could almost see her demise, and she couldn't help but crave it the closer it gets.

'Endure it,' she told herself, 'Just a little more.'

It will all be over soon.

Jennie braced herself, and finally stood, but Countess Melissa tried to intercept her.

"Princess, I beg you to reconsider." Melissa pleads with her, but they were interrupted when someone was already waiting for them outside of the resting room as soon as they stepped out.

It was a messenger, a military aid of Seokjin.

"Seokjin of Oberde wishes to see Princess Jennie. If she could just follow me?" He informed them both, and Melissa looked at her worriedly. Jennie comforted with her eyes and her nimble smile before nodding to the man, who swiftly left, and she followed soon after without any word.

Jennie trailed after him, and found herself standing in a garden, located far away from the banquet hall. It was originally a popular place, decorated with a small outdoor iron table, carved and molded with intricate designs, with matching chairs. Currently, it was empty, save for her fiancé, who must've warded off any people that had dared to come visit the garden and drank his favored dark red liquid.

There was one other glass of wine on the table, as if he was anticipating she would seek him out after the dance. The man, who fetched her, gestured for her to proceed, and when she walked past him, he left them alone for their privacy.

"Seokjin-" she began, but he cut her off immediately when he placed

his empty wine glass on the table with a clink.

When he was certain they were alone, his pleasant demeanor immediately vanished.

"How could you humiliate me? I'm your betrothed!" he spit at her and Jennie fought herself not to flinch.

He reeked of alcohol as he glared hatefully at her. His eyes daze, and his actions sluggish. He was breathing harshly, as Jennie stood frozen. After a few moments, he finally sighed and refilled his glass, picked it up and offered it to her, gesturing to the other glass. "Won't you drink with me, princess?"

Jennie looked at the filled cup, and did as she's told, bringing the cup to her lips and finally taking a sip of the swirling wine as red as blood... She might've not wanted to, but it was a small price to pay for what she'd done in the banquet hall.

As she drank the wine, Seokjin watched her carefully, drinking his own wine as they both finished their drinks in silence. When she was finally done, Jennie placed the glass back down on the table, until a strange feeling overcame her. She frowned in confusion as she stared at the glass...

So clean and polished...

As if no one had even drunk from it.

The strange feeling welled up inside her as alarm bells rang in the back of her mind. Something wasn't right. Something was wrong...

"I..." she spoke blinking back the strange feeling, "I need to go now..."

Was she swaying? It feels like she's swaying...

"There's something..."

"No." Seokjin interrupted her, moving closer to her, touching her cheek. "Stay," he commanded her, as Jennie hazily looked up at him, "Stay with me." he crouched down, and gives her a manic grin, "Just until the drug wears off."

And cold dread settled in the pit of her stomach.





## Chapter 28

### Chapter 28 - Love Potion

Jennie felt as if she was doused in cold water, trapped in a nightmare as her mind grew hazed as she listened to his words. Her breath shuddered as she fought to regain control on her body, which was beginning to turn sluggish...

"Drugs..? What... do you... mean?"

As much as she wished he was only teasing her, and to laugh it off with a statement he was way too drunk so early in the day, she knew the truth wasn't so kind. Was there no end to the trouble that would come at her today?

Seokjin chuckled dryly at her question, "Ah, pretending to be naive, I see," he hummed as his fingers grasped her chin roughly. Despite the pain his touch gave her, Jennie couldn't bring herself to even scream.

Her entire body, including her tongue, grew heavy, as if she was filled with lead. Her limbs refused to cooperate...

"I've treated you nicely because of your status as a princess," he sneered, "And yet you repay me by acting like a bitch." He shook her chin roughly in his anger, "I witness you lose your mind at the sight of that savage, how could I be sure you've remained untouched?" he whispered.

He licked his lips, stared at her as he held a smug look before he leaned closer to whisper by her ear...

"It seems I'll have to see for myself," and cold dread filled Jennie as she struggled to move. She watched as he brought his hand up to caress her neck, trailing down his fingers, and grabbed the neckline of her dress, and had begun to tug it down.

She squeezed her eyes shut in her helplessness. She'd never felt so stupid. She wanted to push him away, get away from as much as possible, but all she could do was shake beneath his touches. She

choked back a sob, unable to call for help.

She felt her dress loosen up, saw the ribbon tying it together fall onto the floor. She felt him draw closer, his hot breath hit her bare skin as she shivered in disgust.

She then saw her vision go dark.

In the recesses of her mind, she could hear drunken laughters, fading in and out around her. It gave him pause to what he had planned doing to her, as he looked back to see the source of the noise.

It was at that moment, that Jennie had begun to regain movement. Using all her strength, she gave a mighty stomp on his foot, dug her heel with so much pressure, Seokjin removed himself from her with a yelp and stumbled back onto a heap on the floor.

"You bitch!" He hissed at her.

Jennie wasted not a second longer, gathered all her clothes close to her chest, and ran. Seokjin yelled profanities after her, as he scrambled to get up on his feet to follow.

She winced at the sensation of the wayward branches as they brushed and scratched her delicate skin. Somewhere during running, she lost her shoes, and now her feet ached as if she was walking on a floor pinned with nails. She tripped on her saggy socks, and quickly got back up heading towards the banquet hall.

She looked around frantically, hearing hushed exclamations and hid. She chanced a look, before she ducked back out of sigh and muffled her breathing as she clasped her hand around her mouth. The shrubs concealed her perfectly, and when she peaked through the leaves, she saw Seokjin's servants looking for her.

It was fortunate they gave up searching the place before they found her, and quickly left to look at the other areas. Jennie sagged her shoulders in relief, before she took calming breaths and looked around.

The garden was like a maze. It's shrubs were expertly placed to increase its aesthetic, and the trees and bushes framed it perfectly,

providing shade upon its visitors, even giving lovers their sought privacy.

When she had regained her strength, Jennie steadily stood up from her hiding place, gave her surroundings one last once over, and darted into the shelter of the garden.

Her arms and legs hurt, and despite her wish to sit down and rest, she couldn't. Escaping from Seokjin was paramount.

However, every twist and turn she took was a dead end. With no way to leave, she was soon overcome by a sensation as if she was the prey, hunted down for sport.

She could see how this would end now. Seokjin's servants would capture her, and be brought to him. Her family wouldn't even be able to do anything about it despite how un noble his intentions would be. And the aristocrats, they would just step aside and spread rumours, telling her what a pity her situation was and make excuses.

No one would protect her. No one would be able to help her.

She figured if she had to give up her body, she would at least have a choice in that matter. Not like this. She didn't want to give into Seokjin like this.

"Wait! I see her!" A shout alerted her that someone was coming, "She's that way!"

Something cool and sweet wafted into her nose as she resumed running away, squeezing every bit of strength remaining in her and towards her legs. With her mind telling her to go towards the smell, she followed her nose, and hoped it would lead her to sweet relief.

She bursted out of the trees as she bulldozed her way through the shrubs and saw the clouds turn dark as the moon peaked out and shone down on her. But the night sky only multiplied the feeling of being trapped.

The air around her went thin as she felt the shortness of her breath.

Then, as if a burst of fresh air, she saw a man, leaned casually against

the tree, smoking a cigarette as the smoke wafted all over him. With a cry, the man was alerted to her presence, and looked at her in shock as she barrelled her way towards him and finally, clung onto him for dear life.

Tears streamed down her face as she sobbed against him. His warm hands wrapped around her protectively as he patted down her mess of a hair, and she finally looked up and pulled away.

She was safe.

"L-Liam," she choked back as the tears fell unabashedly once more. She could only call out his name in desperation. She felt like she was about to burst, everywhere around her hurt so much, chest, arms, feet, head...

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His palms came up to her cheeks, rubbing the tears away as she gasped out in a breath. When she finally calmed down enough, she looked up at him, and he stared right back at her in silence.

"Jennie! Oh Jennie!" Seokjin's voice rang throughout the dead of the night. He called her name out in a sing-song voice, and shivers ran up her spine as she heard it. He cackled loudly as he slowly inched towards their location.

Liam felt the way she began to tremble once more, and that alone was enough to give him an idea on what had transpired. He clenched his jaw, and gritted his teeth. Gently, he unwrapped his arms around her, unclasping his cloak and wrapped it around her small frame.

Jennie's fingers immediately grabbed the purple silk, hugged it tightly around herself.

"Tell me," he said softly, but sternly as he met her gaze, "Should I dispose of him?" he asked coolly, telling her silently he would happily do so too.

Her sight was still hazed, but she could see the golden glint of his eye rather clearly. He was still waiting for her to answer. As much as she wanted to say yes...

Jennie shook her head in negation. At her answer, Liam closed his eyes, and breathed deeply before he opened them and looked at her, his golden eyes glinting dangerously. His lips were pressed to a thin line before placing her gently behind him as he turned to where Seokjin was going to enter from.

"Stay here," he told her in a low voice and moved, but something held him back. It was Jennie. Despite her difficulty to speak, Jennie continued despite her dry throat and quiet voice...

"You..." she gulped to wet her throat, "You can't..."

He can't kill Seokjin, he mustn't. Liam's face morphed into a scowl the more she tried to dissuade him from doing so.

And for the first time since they've met, he found himself raising his voice at her.

"Even at this moment, you're still concerned about the royal family?!" he exclaimed at her in a fury. His pupils narrowed at her, making Jennie feel his genuine anger at her decision. "Even kindness has its limits, my lady." He seethed at her, but Jennie would not be intimidated. She mustn't back down from this.

"Not... the royal family," She answered as she tried to find her voice, "But of Estia. I can't let... the innocents suffer..." She finished softly. Despite his horrendous personality, Seokjin had helped Estia in great significance when he not only blocked the Kurkans, but also kept them in check on the western borders. His life was tied to many innocents.

Unlike hers, where none would be affected. Her death wouldn't bring about a change.

"I just... want to get away from here." She continued, as Liam watched her in silence, telling her he was listening. "Please, I beg of you..." Her grip tightened on his arm.

Liam was breathing deeply. His chest heaved up and down in thought, before his breathing returned to normal. He cursed silently under his breath in Kurkan language, brought a hand up and rubbed

his eyes. After a moment of silence, he finally spoke...

"You're testing the patience of a Kurkan," he warned her. She wanted to apologize to him, for all her troubles. But as soon as she opened her mouth, no voice had come, only a puff of breath. Her body seized up, her grip loosened as she hunched over with a light groan.

All strength had gone from her body as she fell.

Something was strange. The heat began to grow. She felt hotter by the second, as she began to heave for air. Her initial thought was that the adrenaline died down from all the running, and her fatigue had returned with full force...

But it kept getting worse...

"You!" Liam lightly cursed as he crouched down. He felt her body temperature rise and admonished himself for not realizing something was wrong with her.

At his cool touch, Jennie let out a groan. Despite his normal body temperature running higher than hers, this was no normal situation, and his body was now cooler compared to hers.

"What did you eat?" She heard him ask, and the wine glass flashed to her mind...

She remembered how clean the glass was after she drank from it. How smoothly it had gone down her throat than what she had been expecting. She remembered her fiancé's words as he told her he'd keep her company until the drug wore off...

"Jin... the wine..." She whispered, she was beginning to see black spots...

"Come here." Liam's voice whispered back in concern as he grabbed her by the waist, positioning his arm so that she rested against his chest. He grabbed her chin with his other hand, and tilted it up until she met his lips.

He prodded her mouth open, before she felt something slide from his mouth to hers.

It was as if she was shocked by something electric. She clung onto him, not even able to think about pushing him away as her mind grew hazy.

As his tongue darted inside, he tasted the remains of the wine in her mouth and frowned. Slowly he broke away from her and looked at her complexion.

"He met with Dormaris the other day, you remember?" he asked her, and Jennie nodded as she remembered him mingling with the gypsies. Liam let out a sigh. "He bought some love potion from them," he told her, and Jennie's heart sank...

Did this mean she'd fall in love with him?! With Seokjin?

"He, it's okay, it's alright." Liam comforted her, as he took note of her quickening breath, "It's only a name. It's actually a cheap aphrodisiac. Love potions, the real ones are few and far in between..." he continued...

But Jennie could hardly hear him properly, smacking her lips absentmindedly, before her body shook violently.

Hot. Everything turned hotter, like a fireball was churning her stomach. She felt as though she was boiling. Her vision started to blurry the more she tried to keep awake and blinked her eyes to keep her head on straight. But it only got worse.

Above her, Jennie could see Liam as he stared at her with a bemused expression.

"Antidote... we need the antidote..." She mumbled at him, and Liam chuckled softly, smirking as he pulled her closer in a hug...

"Don't worry..." She heard him whisper, "The antidote's right here."

And her vision went black.

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## Chapter 29

### Chapter 29 – Delicious

All her strength left her body. Like a cotton doll, weighed down by water, Jennie collapsed into Liam's arms.

Liam looked down at her and dipped his head. "Choose. What do you want to do now?" He asked.

A hot breath came out as soon as she opened her mouth. The clarity of her mind left her piece by piece, as the fever grew. Her original thoughts slowly disappeared into an abyss as her reason was replaced with honest desire.

Jennie lifted her eyelashes and blinked silently. Her hand slightly trembled as she reached out and carefully grasped the hem of his clothes.

That alone was enough of an answer. Liam hugged Jennie close to him and silently walked across the garden. Seokjin's servants were just around the corner, his rage could easily be heard.

"Get out here right now! You think you can hide?" He screamed in anger.

"I'll go easy on you if you come out now...!"

However, in the safety of the man holding her, Jennie was not the slightest bit afraid. It was as if the noises that were directed at her were from another world. She felt like she was listening from inside a dream, the screams were faint and scattered from one ear to the other. This place was safe. The man holding her was protecting her inside her dream, and Jennie leant a little more against him.

Liam stopped for a moment and glanced at Jennie, Jennie threw his eyes towards the side where Jin was shouting. With his eyes, he gestured above them, a smirk forming on his face. Jennie heard the leaves rustle above their heads.

She was curious and wanted to look at what it was, but her head

hung heavy. With the potion in her veins, she couldn't keep her body steady enough, the fever only adding up. Jennie quietly wriggled uncomfortably.

Her lower body felt numb, adding on to the burning sensation she had felt since a while ago. A ticklish sensation was constantly rushing into her, unable to get rid of the irksome feeling, she writhed in pain, trying to find a release. Jennie continuously gasped and twisted her thighs around. She felt like she was going to die if she didn't get this heat out now.

Liam looked down at her and clicked his tongue.

"Hold on. Otherwise we'll end up doing it in front of your fiancés men'."

He nipped at Jennie's blushing neck.

"I don't care."

The meaning behind the words that left her mouth, were not empty. Liam laughed. He definitely was capable of fulfilling her wish easily.

Jennie shook her dizzy head in a hurry. A small chuckle rolled out from his mouth. He kissed Jennie on the forehead and started moving again.

She completely entrusted her body to him. The surrounding quickly shifted, every time she closed then opened her eyes. After a while, the violent screams of Jin could no longer be heard. Nor did the music from the banquet hall echo around her. She could hear no sounds of the like. Only the peaceful quiet noises of the cicadas in the grass, and the songs of the night birds rang in the air.

When she closed her eyes once again, Jennie found herself in an unfamiliar place.

The aroma of fresh flowers permeated the air; smooth and thick, like cream. The flowers that were about to bloom were dyed pink, and those that had blossomed were fluttering with the wind. Their white petals dancing in the breeze.

The splendid sight of the tuberose under the moonlight was unbelievably beautiful. In Estia, she had lived her entire life in, and

seen the glamorous places around the palace. However, this place was a place she had never known about. It was so strange and unfamiliar that it felt like a dream.

Liam delicately placed Jennie down on the ground.

"It's a good place to smoke and the flowers are pretty." He muttered.

When he said it like that, Jennie inside her mind, felt warm. His voice, that said he came here because the flowers were pretty, tickled her ear. Jennie also liked the fresh and subtle scent of tuberose. She had even once asked the gardener to plant more of them in the royal garden.

For some reason, the tuberose in this corner of the palace, which spotted the area unarranged, were more beautiful than the tuberose that the gardener would meticulously cultivate with all his heart and soul in the royal garden. She felt like she was going to become intoxicated on the smell of the flowers all over this place.

Liam took off his coat. The long line of intricate buttons on his clothes all burst off with one move from his hand. The Jewel encrusted buttons scattered over the flower bed, twinkling like stars. The precious clothes that a certain craftsman must have dedicated long hours towards and curated with so much effort, now lay on crumpled on the ground. The clothes would probably get stained by the grass, but he showed no concern for that. He laid it on the ground like a rag for Jennie and set her down. His hands quickly rolled up the skirt of her dress exposing her bare white legs.

"...."

He furrowed his brows together. Liam carefully wrapped his hands around Jennie's ankles. Her socks were in tatters, torn and stained with dirt and blood. He sighed and fiddled with her calves.

"You should have at least told me to cut off his legs."

There was a chaotic mix of emotions in his eyes as he muttered unintelligibly. Liam raised his eyebrows. With a somewhat angry expression, he lifted her dress up to her thigh.

"I'll become the most patient Kurkan in the world, thanks to you." He declared before pulling peeling her skirt up and giving her the hem of the dress.

"Hold it."

Jennie did as she was told and held on to the dress with both her hands. The cool breeze caressed her hot skin. It suddenly dawned on her—the reality that she was going to have intercourse outside.

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There were countless people that would hide in the garden to enjoy a tryst during each banquet. Jennie would sometimes go out to enjoy the night breeze, and there were many times where she would have to quickly turn away after hearing a passionate cry.

"There are already a lot of people doing this around here. So, we won't even stand out." Had he just guessed what she was thinking?

Aside from being caught by someone, it was even more shocking to her that she was doing something like this. Because, this is, really...

"Why, because this is what beasts do? Is that what it says in Estia's court etiquette? I guess that's not far from the truth since you are doing it with an animal right now."

Jennie opened and closed her lips with hazy eyes. How did he know? It felt like Liam could read all her inner thoughts.

"I didn't read it. You are talking right now. Looks like you are completely gone."

He bit her fluttering lips lightly.

"Looks like the potion is quite strong...."

Liam's hand caressed her calves for a long time and grabbed her thigh. His sleek fingers gripped her thighs so hard it felt like it would pop. She was sure that it should be painful but strangely it was closer to pleasure than pain. The inside of her thighs trembled with a strange excitement. It was so itchy that her body couldn't handle it.

She gulped and stared at the man in front of her.

She knew the pleasure he would bring her. Her waist shook instinctively, as soon as she imagined how it would feel to have his long fingers deep inside her and stir her around. Jennie trembled and shook little by little, she spread her legs a little without even realizing.

Liam, who was still watching her silently, let out a chuckle.

"You think that's enough? Spread it wider."

Her mind kept growing impatient. It was so itchy inside that she was going crazy. She opened her legs wide hoping he would touch her quickly, and as soon as she did, he kissed her above her knees and praised her.

"There. Good job."

His eyes reached the deepest point between her legs. His blunt, explicit gaze felt almost tangible. She curled her toes, not able to bear the anticipation. Her nervousness rose.

Unknown to Jennie, her lower body was already soaked. Her face turned red as she realized how moist her nether region was. The blushing Jennie felt like at any moment, she could burst. Jennie bit her lips and whispered.

"L, Liam, I, I feel so strange..."

His eyes that were looking down lifted back up. The golden color of his pupils deepened. Liam laid Jennie back.

"What feels strange?" The mischievous man knowingly asked.

"Uhh, haaa...."

She closed her eyes and swallowed a moan. Her body was stimulated and irritated even by the slightest touch of the soft clothes on her skin. Her insides convulsed and she felt herself dripping down below. The hot liquid leaked down her thighs. If this went on, Jennie felt like she really was going to die. Her next words came out like a sob.

"Underneath... It feels weird below..."

"How?"

"It's wet...and water keeps coming out..."

He tore off her underwear. A piece of the stained cloth fell on top of white tuberoses. Liam firmly pressed Jennie's thigh with both hands, so that she couldn't move and put his head in between.

"It's overflowing."

She suddenly felt concerned. Hearing him describing her wet state as if she was a broken dam made her worried. Her body might have been messed; due to her the unfamiliar drug she had taken. Liam chuckled lightly.

"Do you want me to stop it?"

She wasn't sure if she nodded or begged him to do it. Liam slowly brought his head lower and lower while she tried to regain her dim consciousness. She could feel his hot breath pour over her underneath.

Jennie opened her eyes wide and cried.

"...Uck!"

A moving lump of tender flesh licked her below, where it was iron-hot. He stiffened his tongue and licked her. It was as if his probing tongue wanted to taste an appetizer first, and then sucked on her hot bump. Her body curled up at the soft sensation that rubbed on her body.

Jennie's thighs were frantically trying to bounce up, but they wouldn't move an inch because of his hands firmly pressing down on them. Beneath the attack of his tongue and the wet sounds of his saliva and her juices mixing, her panting was audible.

"Ah, ah. N, no... Stop..."

The sensation was beyond her limit. The delirious feeling, he aroused

within her was almost to the point of pain. She teared up, unable to withstand it. However, Liam didn't stop. His relentless, unforgiving attack continued as he dug even farther into her.

His middle finger slid over the smooth texture of her petals, then opened her up and dug in slowly. He didn't forget to lick the swollen stiff bump as he inserted his finger.

The squelches of the liquid sloshing inside came out as he bent the inserted finger at a slight angle and slowly moved it around several times. Her wet inner walls clung to his fingers, as if to signify that they had been waiting for it.

"Heuk, ha...N, no, take your fingers out please...!"

"Are you having a hard time with just one finger?"

Liam sucked below. The smacking of a wet noise as his lips suctioned her cave could be heard. He grinned satisfyingly.

"I need to put in something bigger, so I have to widen you up."

Liam's fingers moved short and fast. With only a thin mucous membrane separating them, his soft tongue constantly licked and sucked on top, and his hard fingers poked roughly below. Jennie saw an illusion of lightning raining down in front of her eyes. Her exposed skin was so hot that it was glowing. She couldn't stand it any longer. Jennie, close to tears, called out to Liam.

"L-Liam... Ah, ahh!"

He stuck his finger deep inside. Her head turned back and a scream like moan broke out. Her flattened lower belly convulsed.

The climax was long, and so strong that it made her mind go white. The sensation that furiously hit her body did not die down easily. The inside of her body convulsed and spurted out juices. A sticky thread dragged out as he slowly pulled out his finger from her soaking hole. Liam licked his finger and laughed.

"It's delicious."





## Chapter 30

### Chapter 30 – Two Figures Basking in the Moonlight

On a normal occasion, had she heard his salacious words, perhaps she'd have blushed. The erotic words, out of embarrassment, would have made her unpleasantly quiver. However, Jennie currently could not muster any reaction. At this very moment, she was wooden.

It felt as if the overwhelming amount of pleasure from Liam's intense attack had numbed her brain, turning it into a mushed pudding. In her weakened state, she was only capable of powerlessly grasping the hem of her dress with her trembling hands.

Crimson palm prints adorned her pale, powerless thighs. Liam, still unsated, sucked her flesh hard between his lips, leaving just another glaring mark.

The act was so wild, that looking down, the inside of her thighs could be seen dotted with his traces. It was a clear meaning.

You are mine.

Exhausted and completely powerless, Jennie suddenly flinched back. Whilst being ravished by him, her eye accidentally caught sight of it. The barbaric king took hold of what he had just taken out of the waistline of his trousers.

With such a monstrosity she'd seen, even in her drug-induced, hazy state, she felt uneasy, thinking that it would be too much for her to accommodate—unbearable even.

His thick member had bulging blood vessels the shade of a deep, rich wine. In its engorged state, the fresh blood rushing to the end visibly pulsed. To say the raw size of the genitalia, was as large as the head of a young beast, was not an exaggeration.

Liam's fingers rubbed her petals and tapped the head of his thick length against her entrance. The act, bringing them closer together, made her heart race.

With the drug in her veins, she found it hard to speak—her speech distorted, her words slurred without her control. Nonetheless, she fought against the weight of her tongue.

"It's too big...It, It won't fit..." Words escaped from her lips in a stutter.

Liam's chuckle, which sounded distant, grazed her ears. "It fit last time. Have you forgotten already?"

In contrary to what he had just said, there was no way she could forget their heated encounter. How could she? It had been the most shocking experience of Jennie's life. However, seeing her unresponsive expression, Liam concluded by himself that she had, indeed, forgotten.

A low grumble came out his throat, and he laughed mischievously. "I'll have to put it in often then, so you won't forget."

Before Jennie could utter anything in response, Liam pushed himself inside her. She couldn't help but cry out, as soon as his thick member went in—the immense pleasure and the inevitable pain that came with it, was overwhelming.

His shaft was not something her body could easily accommodate. Even though he had diligently loosened her up with his fingers, her lower part squeezed him tightly, a feeble attempt to push back the foreign object.

Her stomach felt full to the brim, that a slight bulge could be seen. Her tears mixed with saliva trailed down her chin.

It was then that he started to move his waist back and forth a bit, then he gripped Jennie's waist tightly and rammed in, pushing the rest of him inside her in one motion mercilessly. His rod, which plunged into her without notice, suddenly hit her innermost part.

This time, she couldn't even scream. Jennie could only tremble and manage to let out short gasps and cries. Her wet and sticky insides, convulsed, chewing at the large intruder.

"Fuck, Jennie..." A guttural moan came from Liam.

His adam's apple bobbed, and a seething voice spouted out shakingly.

"Ugh...you're clenching so hard..."

Jennie's feet that had floundered helplessly through the air had almost touched the ground. Liam grabbed her ankles and lifted it up.

"Be careful with your feet."

It was only then did she remember that she had wounds on the soles of her feet. Their union had made her delirious. She had been too drunk on the excitement to feel the pain. Liam perched Jennie's leg on the expanse of his shoulder. As her hips were lifted, her waist bent back allowing her dress to flow down freely, revealing her skin even more.

Liam frowned, maybe it was because the dress was too cumbersome, that even when he held it down with his hands, it still got in the way. He wasn't patient enough to finely untie each of the complicated ribbons and knots on her dress. He needed to strip it off completely in the fastest way possible.

The veins on his hands showed how tense he was to rid the bothersome clothing. His fingers hooked onto the soft silk and organza, and with little effort, completely tore her dress off of her.

A flash of worry crossed her mind at the ripping sound of cloth. However, that worry was short lived as it faded away as fast as it came. Liam held her by the back of her thighs, lifting it. Her legs dangled in the air as her body bent over.

The muscles firmly squeezed with power. She thought he was going to relent, when suddenly, he pressed his full weight in one sharp movement. From above, he began to pound on her ruthlessly.

The fast, heavy motions as his length moved in and out of her, drilled her down to the earth. Jennie opened her eyes wide and tears welled down her face at his ferocious attack.

Her body was no longer hers. In sync with him, she rocked his fast rhythm, the weight-bearing tip of his sword was piercing through her belly. She couldn't breathe and her eyes blinked in frenzy.

"Ah! Ah!..."

Her heated body foolishly took him. Jennie laid there convulsing, shaken to the point she was unable to move even an inch. Her loud groans that constantly rang out were music to Liam's ears.

He pushed Jennie so far to the edge that she was given no room to think about holding back her scandalous moans, even though they were outside.

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It felt too hot. He was like an inferno, a tanned God clinging to her. All of them were violently burning Jennie up. Her mouth, because of the intense heat, opened against her will...

"M-More...Ahh, right there..ugh...hmm..."

"Here?"

"Yes, hmm, that's good, so good."

His large member rubbed all of her insides, discovering her smooth, heated walls. She felt like she was going to go insane whenever he moved. Every spot was stimulated by him. The pleasantness that followed cascaded onto her; a rushing waterfall as he missed not a single spot.

Continuing on his raucous attack, Liam grasped her swollen chest. His calloused fingers glazed over her porcelain skin and pinched. The twin peaks conformed to the shape of his hands, their erect mounds inviting Liam to touch them.

Taking note of Jennie's state, a cunning idea formed. He rubbed them hard, simultaneously, his hips rocked faster. The lower engorged region pumped into where he and Jennie became one, whilst his fingers assaulted her above.

"Ahhhhh, ugh!"

Her lower abdomen tightened along with the thrilling sensation. She felt something burst in her lower belly and her inner walls convulsed.

The result, a rush of body fluid drenching where they were connected.

Liam's shaft plunged into the deepest part of her body. The incessant rhythm of their bodies colliding, proved Liam's desire to meld them together. Liam let go of her chest, only to reach behind her and hold her buttocks, hugging her tighter to him. There were no longer any visible gaps between them. Jennie's belly and chest were pressed right against his muscled body. She frantically moaned and cried. The thing inside her pulsed and grew, and Liam uttered a deep groan.

Something warm endlessly poured out and his semen filled her up, the head of his shaft twitching against her cervix. Jennie let her hands and feet hang. Liam, relished the moment. His mind was in pure bliss, his lower region, still inside her, leisurely moved. Liam looked down at where they were connected.

The mixture of body fluids and semen made it look like a mess. The fluids clinging to her stood out even more, as Jennie, who had no pubic hair, was smooth.

Looking at the red and swollen clit, Liam let out a sneaky laugh. He flicked it causing her to moan, and slightly regain her consciousness. She tried to push his agitating hand away that had begun to arouse her again.

"Ah...hee...N-no..."

However, She regretted that right away. Liam took his hand away, then grabbed her waist instead. He then proceeded to sit on the floor and sat Jennie on top of her.

His member, which was still inside her, changed its position and pushed back deeper inside, kissing her cervix. It had no problems reaching the deepest parts of her, even though it was limp as it was still so big.

Jennie, who was still sobbing due to the aftermath of her climax, was startled. Liam supported Jennie's waist so she wouldn't fall backwards, and pulled her in with his hand on the back of her neck.

"I'll massage your chest. Come here."

His fingers pinched her nipples. He licked Jennie's whimpering face, as he gently rubbed her engorged twin peaks with his thumb and index finger. He wet his lips with saliva and licked her. His tongue moved on to her cheeks that were wet with tears, and then finally not forgetting her earlobes, which had turned bright red. He bit and sucked on them too.

Her white mounds were caught in Liam's grasp. He sucked and bit on one side, and he repeatedly patted and gently twisted the other with his fingers.

Jennie wriggled her waist and grabbed his forearm tight. Her nails clawed at his arm, yet, it was hard to scratch his hard skin.

She felt his sword that was inside her regain its strength and get hard again, as she wriggled and twisted her body around not being able to stand the ticklish sensation. His lower body slowly started to regain its previous vigor.

She felt both dread and anticipation, when she thought about him doing it to her again. In contradiction to herself, Jennie stared at Liam, wanting him to touch and rub her more. She saw mirth spread in his eyes.

"You want me to hammer you?"

She hesitated then nodded. Her heart swelled at that moment, and she arched her back. Liam leaned back, and smirked. His hand let go of his attack and he slid his hand to the front of her belly, where a part of him protruded. Putting up an act of annoyance, he shook his head. Jennie twisted her body and licked him, despite his act.

"What do I do with you liking it so much? I can't put it in you all day."

He clutched her chest, a mischievous expression on his face. "Ah, I should at least get a similar toy and send it to the palace."

Jennie bit her lips tight. She despised him for constantly saying vulgar things to her. Her eyes welled up with tears of sorrow. Her

feverish brain was unable to filter out her thoughts and let them slip from her mouth as it was.

"Why...why do you keep saying those things..."

Jennie let out a whimper. Her eyes were misty, and it looked like at any moment, her tears would spill but she forced herself to swallow them back.

"Don't do that...." Don't derogate me, more than I have been already.

Liam paused and his lips parted so slightly. He looked at Jennie blankly for a moment, and then muttered quietly.

"...alright."

It was a gentle and tender answer. Genius looked at his serene eyes. Like to a honey, it was sweet and enchanting. In that moment, those orbs gazing back at her were void of any sign of sharpness and fierceness.

The wind fluttered around them, carrying with it the heavy scent of flowers. The pleasant fragrance soon filled her nostrils. All the sweetness combined, and the aroma that she inhaled, caused her heart to throb. It was too much, did she deserve this? She was worried that her heart, which was beating so fast, was so loud that Liam could hear it.

A frail petal gently floated with the breeze, joining many more on Liam's chest. His smooth, tanned skin was now strewn with white petals. Jennie hesitated a little, before softly sweeping them away.

"...resembles you."

At the sudden sound of his voice, Jennie shifted her eyes towards him. Liam took off one of the petals from her hair and murmured. "It looks like you. These flowers."

Her heart beat even more. Liam let out a peal of loose laughter and embraced Jennie in his arms, caressing her silver hair.

"Give me a kiss."





## Chapter 31

### Chapter 31 – Bed of Roses

Jennie gently grazed his face, her dainty fingers softly glided over his brow, slowly making their way down to the sharp cheekbones and halting at his lips.

Liam closed his eyes allowing her to gently brush back the hair that stuck to his forehead. The thin strands of dark brown hair loosened under her touch. A tingling sensation coursed through his body.

She quickly brought her lips to his. It was a light, delicate peck—like a brush of a feather against his moist ones... inciting a desire for more.

Liam gently smacked his lips recalling the kiss, and laughed when she accidentally kissed him on the corner of his mouth.

He wrapped his hand around the back of her head and pulled her head closer. Any gap between them was gone as they delved into a wild kiss. Surprised, she tried to pull back, but as if he'd anticipated her reaction, he held her firmly- keeping her from moving.

"Mmm..."

A small moan escaped her mouth. The light peck had long transformed into a ravenous smooch, each feeding the fire of insatiable carnal desire.

His hot tongue squeezed in between her lips. It was an explorer, sweeping across the roof of her mouth and sliding along her teeth. He dug inside her deep and rough, unbridled... then, he finally licked her lower swollen lips, biting affectionately.

He was so intense it made her dizzy. He grabbed the small of her neck as her body fell back at the forceful kiss, he kneaded her backside.

Jennie hesitated for a second and then hugged him back. Her loose grasp faltered – rendered momentarily sapped. The heat emanating

from their entwined bodies, stoked their passion; their sweat acted as an adhesive, they're inseparable.

When their lips eventually parted, Liam's eyes were no longer gentle and his member poking her stomach was rock hard. Her lower body tingled and an unbearable sensation rose from deep within.

Jennie titillating face was enough to impel him into action.

"Hnnn, ah, Liam..."

The only person she could hang on to amid the burning rapture, was the man inciting it. She cried out his name, bit hard on his shoulder hard leaving marks on this copper skin, as she rode the wave of pleasure.

"Ahh, ughh..."

Liam, unlike his frenzied hands exploring her curves and peaks, only moved his lower body slightly. It was as if he was constraining himself, trying not to scare her. Albeit, it had the opposite effect – his slight thrusts drove her crazy.

A part of her hoped he would just take her without any restraint. She wanted him to torment every inch of her, and quell her flaming desire– once and for all. If in that moment, Liam's heat melted her to the ground, she wouldn't mind.

He wanted to torment every inch of her too, savour in their burning lust and finish her off. Jennie's bosom shuddered, she leapt onto his core and enveloped him in her arms.

Liam leaned back, sitting her atop his stomach, to prevent the clinging Jennie from using her feet. The clothes scattered on the floor had long tuned to a crumpled mess due to their violent union.

He fell on the bed of roses as his body leaned back.

Liam looked like a painting, as he laid there buried in the disheveled white tuberoses that contrasted with his deep, dark skin. Jennie took a brief glance at his face and quickly sprung onto him. She hugged his nape with both arms and pressed her face against his. It was almost as if she wanted to ingrain herself into him – the very loss of touch;

of intimacy, was unbearable. Her lips glided across his sharp jawline and she kissed his chiseled chin.

Her frantic pecks inaccurately tried to find his lips. An onslaught of small quick kisses ensued. Alas, she finally found his lips and pushed her tongue in. What he had done earlier, his actions had impressed on her mind. She clumsily tried to replicate his moves.

The man empathized, he reciprocated by deftly maneuvering his tongue and entwining them.

"Ha-huh..."

The ecstasy of kissing him, whilst his large meat was inside her made her delirious. She instinctively tightened her thighs, sneakily rubbing her clit between her stiff legs on his smooth abs. However, she felt like he'd already noticed, as she was soaked underneath.

Jennie sobbed and whined at him.

"It's so itchy inside..."

He looked at the red and crying Jennie clutching him, and sighed.

"You're driving me crazy.

He nipped at the tip of her nose.

"Do you know what your face looks like right now? Do you know how sexy it is?"

He looked at Jennie, who couldn't answer properly. He sighed in defeat and slowly murmured.

"Is it my good fortune that I decided to smoke today? Just thinking of how you might have shown such a face to that bastard Seokjin makes me...."

He didn't say the rest. However, he put more strength in his grip on her. After a moment of silence, his cold voice sounded.

"I should have killed him."

He immediately started to move her waist upwards. Because of her position on his stomach, his shaft dug deeper than before. The tip poked where it should never come in.

She panted incessantly and rubbed her face against his chest. After a point, she could no longer take it. Her cries of protest fell on deaf ears, she tried to get off his stomach.

"Ah, it's too deep, Ugh...!"

Liam steadied her with his grip and pressed hard on her back. Jennie crushed securely against him, having no choice but to lie flat down again.

"Where are you going?"

Liam firmly grasped her bottom with both hands. The plump mounds, molded between his fingers, small bumps of her skin peeked out from beneath. He's unable to control strength, he was invigorated.

In the next instance, he rammed his thick member inside her, penetrating so hard, that thudding sounds could be heard from the point of contact. Her body shook as he bounced her up and down.

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"This is what you wanted. You should eat more."

"Hhhh, ah... Ahhhh, Liam...!" Jennie screamed, her voice shouting in protest, her mind lusting for more.

"I'll have to fill you up properly so that your mind won't crave it for a while."

Her helpless moans and whimpers resonated through the quiet night. The sound of slapping bodies and heavy breathing intensified. Her eyes glistened with tears, she could faintly glimpse the fluttering moonlight as she threw her head back. She dug her fingernails deep into his back, unrestrained. Her mind went blank, an incredible, indescribable pleasure swept her senses.

"Hick, haaaang!"

Jennie let out seductive sobs and arched her hips. She climaxed, her nectar trickling down. She looked especially frail and sensual in the afterglow.

Then, a chill ran down her spine, her hands and feet wouldn't stop trembling.

His grasp tightened, he did not stop. Instead, he pushed his still invigorated rod, deeper. He sucked the saliva dribbling down her open lips, nibbling her cheek as he did so.

"I'll fill you up till you're full today!" He declared.

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How many times did they do it?

Jennie had lost all semblance of reality, she could no longer tell where she ended and Liam began.

After the second time, her memory blurred. All that remained was a faint recollection of their frenzied union; their last sliver of reserve had long escaped its shackles as Liam took her like a beast.

The last she remembered was her delirious scream; cries of ecstatic pleasure. It seemed like she had fainted after that. She hadn't eaten properly in order to prepare for the banquet, so it was only natural that her body could not handle it, after she engaged in such fierce lovemaking.

Jennie forced her leaden eyelids to open. She desperately needed to moisten her parched throat. "Water, I need water."

"..."

A long piece of fluttering cloth caught her eye. It was a curtain, embroidered with elaborate patterns, freely fluttering with the wind. Her consciousness slowly returned to her, she began to notice her surroundings. Her eyes stared vacantly, as if studying the intricate patterns on the curtains.

Jennie found herself in a quiet dark room. A haze of smoke placed a filter, the silence so intense that even the inaudible whirlwind of dust could be heard.

Peeking through the window, silver light from the perfectly rounded moon shone through. A world of stars painted the sky, allowing her to see a prism of small, glittering gems, that dotted the sky through the clear glass panes.

It was surreal. Jennie felt someone touching her hair. Her eyelids fluttered continuously, trying to comprehend whether she was still in a dream, or this trance was a reality. The warmth that playfully touched and gently combed through her hair was reassuring.

After a while of feeling the touch, she realized that she was lying on a bed. Her head was resting against a warm, firm mound – to be precise, she was using a taut thigh as a pillow.

The man, leaning against the bedside, was relaxedly smoking. With a cigarette between his index and middle finger, he had one limb raised at a ninety degree angle and the other laid out for her.

He took a deep drag and exhaled. The hazy smoke that followed his long breath, scattered in the dawn air. The cool, yet sweet scent, slowly wafted through the room.

Jennie, who had been staring at him for a long time, wriggled her body. She no longer had the energy to get up herself. So, she only managed to slightly move her head. Thankfully, the man whose bronzed thigh she was using as a pillow, immediately noticed. His golden eyes that were staring into the distant twilight turned to her.

She smacked and puckered her lips.

"Water..."

Liam pulled her up and leaned her on his chest. He stubbed his cigarette on the brass ashtray on the bed, and reached out to the bedside table.

Picking up the ewer, he had a mouthful. Then, looking at her parched lips, he kissed her, slowly releasing the water into her mouth. She gulped the cool water passing through his lips, drinking down to the

last drop. Her eyes lingered on his, asking for more.

Liam again fed her water in the same way. She felt some of her senses return after she'd sated her thirst. However, she still had no strength in her body, and her mind was still hazy. She felt like someone was constantly poking her head with a small needle. Her perception was distorted, her vision spiraling.

"I feel dizzy....," she said meekly.

Liam passed something through her lips, as soon as she whined and shook her head.

"Don't swallow it, just let it sit in your mouth, for a few seconds, then spit it out... Yes, that's it, like that."

The cigarette smoke mellowly filled her mouth, and interestingly enough as soon as the cool scent permeated in her moistened cavity, her headache disappeared. The dizziness too slowly subsided. She wanted to swallow it, but lacked the strength to do so, so she kept it in her mouth and spat it out like she was bid.

"Good job."

He kissed her lightly. She liked the cool sensation and wanted to taste some more. She opened her mouth again, but Liam took it away firmly.

"No. Too much of even medicine is poison." His soothing voice turned down her silent plea.

A warm hand covered her eyes as she looked at him with sadness. His deep, low voice sounded like a lullaby.

"You should be all right now."

That one word magically reassured her.

Yes, everything was going to be all right.

She closed her eyes, hiding in the darkness his palm bathed them in.

Drowsiness started to occlude her thoughts. Slowly, she sank back into a deep slumber.

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## Chapter 32

### Chapter 32 – I Waited for You

The first rays of sunshine crept in, peeping through the window onto the slumbering princess. The peaceful surrounding was intoxicatingly rich, free of chaos, enticing her to remain forever. Deep into a sweet dream, she was absolutely unfazed by the outside world.

For someone who had been unable to have a proper sleep lately, the tranquility of pure silence that enveloped her, was a ray of salvation. After a while, she finally roused from sleep.

"...."

A groggy Jennie woke up, disconcerted. She rubbed her eyes, trying to brush away the traces of drowsiness.

Ah!

Bringing her fingers to her eyes, felt like moving mountains. Her limbs cried out in unison, the aching soreness of her muscles was beyond the point of unbearable – it was so painful that as she moved, she thought she could hear the bells of death ringing in her ears.

She struggled for a bit, but resigned to her body's vehement protests and fell back onto the bed. Her shifting made the beddings that encapsulated her rustle move, giving off a cool feathery sensation that soothed her.

Suddenly, her eyes opened wide as she realized what she was covering herself with. The soft elegant fabric was in fact, silk; dyed in deep navy blue. The silver sheen reflected on the quilt indicated it was made of the highest quality. Additionally, it kept her warm, despite its thinness.

An intricate pattern of dahlia night flowers and wreaths was embroidered with gold and rustic bronze threads. On the hem, two swirls, which appeared to resemble waves, outlined the floral pattern. Flicks of branches and leaves were also dotted in thread between the

pattern of the quilt, harmonising with the dahlias.

It was needless to say an exotic pattern that was completely unfamiliar to Jennie. It was not a product of Estia.

Jennie's eyes fluttered open to the sea of indigo and gold around her and slowly, she scanned her surroundings.

Above her, was the elegant canopy of a bed, and a darkly painted ceiling that had shapes of wild horses and dahlias carved into its wood. A gold plated rim surrounded the edges of where the ceiling met the walls, which too had been painted a deep shade of celestial blue.

Looking around, the walls also bore the same pattern of her quilt—delicate swirl designs were found on its surface. To her side, the sculpture of a horse head hung above, hovering a circular table made of redwood.

Not far from it, a huge window that spanned the height from the floor to the ceiling could be seen.

Large mauve curtains were drawn to obscure the light, though some beams had managed to pass through, illuminating the soft velvet carpet.

After observing the unique color and patterns of the room, she gradually realized that she was in fact, inside the Royal Palace of Estia. Yet, the room she was in was decorated in Kurkan style. Most likely, it was probably how the royal palace, as courtesy, decorated the rooms where the Kurkans stayed.

But why am I here?

Jennie blankly looked at the container placed on top of the table where a refreshing scent came from. Squinting her eyes, she found that its source was none other than a tobacco which Liam smoked.

She tried to shuffle closer, but stopped by a radiating pain coming from her feet. When she rolled up the blanket, she saw her feet wrapped in bandages. Fragments of her memory soon started to hit her as she gazed at the meticulously wrapped

linens from the soles of her feet up to her thin ankles.

So, I drank the wine that Seokjin handed to me and...

As she recollected the events from yesterday, her parted mouth slowly widened—what had transpired between her and Liam dawned on her. Instantly, her cheeks turned red, looking as if they were about to burst. Jennie grabbed the pillowcase and abashedly buried her face.

"Ahh..."

As thoughts of yesterday flashed through her mind, she wished she had not remembered it at all. She was appalled as she thought of how she had clung to Liam, crying and pleading for his help in such a disorderly way. Her mouth spewed out disgraceful and brazen words as they made love to each other.

Alas! The princess had behaved like a beast, losing herself under the influence of the potion. She tore at her innocent pillow. No matter how much she regretted what had happened that night, she could not undo her actions.

"..."

Jennie carefully curled her aching legs. The throbbing pain was a vivid reminder of how Liam had taken her wildly. The tone of his bronzed skin, slick against hers, the smooth texture of his rippling muscles, and the rhythmic motion of their nether regions slapping against each as they connected—her limbs felt feverish and sore as she remembered how untamed they had been.

She was not sure but certain parts of her body may likely be swollen too. Jennie intended to endure the pain quietly but the feeling of hopelessness slowly crept into her.

From the light coming from the window, it appeared to be noon—the sun had risen, already high in the sky. Half of the morning had just disappeared, Jennie surmised. She realized that, due to her absence, a pandemonium in the palace might have already occurred. Worst, she found herself unsure on how to settle it.

Her fingers swept through her hair, parting it to one side. She couldn't help but sigh at her spinning thoughts, which she tried to passively organize.

The first thing she had to do, was to go back to the main palace.

Jennie forced her throbbing arm, which could barely move, to pull the string hanging from the canopy of the bed. In response, a bell rang and the door opened after a faint knock.

The woman who appeared had quite a large build, making the door dwarf in comparison. Tall muscular physique, with deeply tanned skin and broad shoulders—these were all features unique to a Kurkan. The woman dipped her head low and politely greeted Jennie.

In return, the princess looked at the woman in the eye.

"It is a pleasure to meet you, princess. I am the escort guard of Liam. You may call me Genin."

Jennie's eyes raked over the woman in front of her. She had not seen her during the welcome banquet and conference for the Kurkans. Yet, despite not appearing in public, for her to be an escort guard, Genin must have possessed a high status.

To her surprise, Genin returned her scrutiny with an equal curious gaze. It was only after a short while that Genin, who had been blatantly observing her, realized the rudeness of her actions. Flustered, she hurriedly apologized to the princess before her.

"Pardon my rudeness for staring." A reddish tinge on the woman's brusque face appeared. "I was just startled by the fact that you have such a white and small physique."

Her following remark, too, was considered rude in Estia. However, Jennie found her frankness rather pleasant, making her smile gently in response.

It was indeed true that she was smaller than what was considered average for women. Moreover, her pale complexion was quite extraordinary, especially when paired with her silver hair. For the Kurkans, she resembled a glass mannequin rather than a human.

"I apologize. Please forgive my lack of courtesy," Genin sincerely

voiced her remorse.

"It's fine." Jennie insisted, waving her hand at the woman, who was incessantly apologizing.

Genin then gingerly approached the bed, and carefully placed on it the tray she had been carrying.

"I have brought you something light to eat," she said with her head down.

However, it was today that Jennie discovered the disparity between Estians' and Kurkans' culture. A tray, towering with a variety of delicacies, with just the assortment of bread alone being three storey high, was the Kurkan's definition of a light meal.

She let out a furtive sigh at the culinary spectacle before her. Then, hesitantly, she reached out to the top loaf, afraid that one wrong touch and the delicately balancing loaves would crumble down.

"These are your drinks, but I am not familiar with your preferences, hence I prepared these... This is for your dessert..."

The glasses she had placed on the table, crowded the small space. The one standing on the edge would at any moment, fall and shatter, thereby spilling its contents. Jennie reached out to save it from dangerously falling. Her action of picking up only one glass of milk, startling Genin.

"This is enough for me."

"Yes??"

Due to Genin's shocked response at her choice to eat only a meager amount of food, Jennie popped one more fruit to her mouth. Watching her eat, Genin uncomfortably fidgeted. She cautiously raised her voice in an apprehending tone.

"Is the food not good? I prepared Estian food though..."

"I do not eat much." Leah curtly responded.

"..."

Genin's facial expression became even more puzzled—doubting whether the princess was trying to starve herself to death. Jennie smiled a little as if she read Genin's mind. Concurrently, it seemed that she had also discovered as to why Liam chose not to expose Genin to the public.

Jennie's meal quickly ended with a piece of bread, a glass of milk, and several fruits. While gathering the dishes, Genin stole glances at Jennie, internally brooding if she would want to eat more.

However, Jennie's resolve was undeterred. For her, she had already eaten too much.

Whilst Jennie was looking at Genin who was cleaning up the dishes, she noticed a tattoo carved on the back of her hand. As she looked on, she noticed that the tattoo extended to her forearm covered by her sleeves.

She suddenly remembered Liam, particularly his body, which was surprisingly devoid of any tattoos.

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Deep in her thoughts, Jennie was unaware that she had been staring at Genin's tattoo for too long, her attention was caught by the intricate pattern of an ink on skin. Noticing the princess' fascination, Genin pulled up her sleeves allowing Jennie a better glimpse of her tattoo.

She displayed her forearm, and spoke to Jennie, "I only have one tattoo."

Fortunately, she did not seem to regard Jennie's curiosity as rude. Jennie hesitated for a moment, then after contemplating whether it would be appropriate to ask the Kurkan woman before her, asked a question which she had been pondering curiously about.

"I had initially thought that all of the Kurkans have tattoos, but it appears that your king does not have any."

After blurting such words, her cheeks flushed in embarrassment. It was the same as admitting to having already seen Ishakan unclothed,

in all his glory. However, it fortunately appeared that Genin was indifferent, and seemed not to have thought of it.

"Yes, King Liam has no tattoo at all." Genin's eyes sparkled with adoration. Her tone was full of pride for the Kurkan King.

"It means that he has never lost a fight."

Jennie had heard stories of the Kurkans determining their rank by force. But it was her first time to hear what the tattoos symbolized for them. Furthermore, knowing that he had never lost a battle...

It was a surprising story, which somehow, felt reasonable. Defeat did not suit Liam. It was more befitting of him, to sit on the highest throne and look down victoriously from above. Jennie thought of Liam's impertinent golden eyes as she spoke.

"The king helped me yesterday."

She grabbed her blanket as she was engulfed with shame and continued to slowly speak.

"Please send my gratitude."

"I will tell the King."

Genin smiled the first time. With unease creeping up, Jennie quickly changed the subject. "Can you bring these clothes too?"

"All right, princess. The king has some work so he is not here at the moment. I will escort you to the palace."

Jennie brooded over what would be the better choice—going to the palace with Genin, or having the maids come here. Both of the scenarios were terrible. The latter seemed to be a little better than going to visit him in person, however, amongst the maids, there were some who were afraid of the Kurkans.

Even Countess Melissa had felt fearful when she encountered Liam. After pondering for a few moments, Jennie decided to not inconvenience her maids by asking them to come to her, and instead chose to head to the palace with Genin.

With Genin's help, Jennie was able to dress properly. Though the king's escort guard was a little clumsy, most likely unused to attending a princess like Jennie, she still eagerly assisted her. As she helped her put on a soft gown, Genin also made efforts to talk with Jennie, despite not being blessed to strike conversations easily.

It was her attempt to make Jennie feel more comfortable around her and on the side, she wanted to make a favorable impression on Kurkan women. And judging on the princess' calm and trusting dexterity around her, it seemed like she had succeeded.

As soon as Jennie was dressed, Genin's arm immediately wrapped around her waist to support her.

Since Leah couldn't possibly walk with the scrapes and wounds of her feet, Genin carried Jennie in her arms—one arm under her legs and the other supporting her back like a groom carrying his bride

.  
"Please excuse me, princess."

Startled, Jennie's gaze rose to the sky, but unilaterally decided it was best to lean on Genin. In that form, they went straight to the carriage. She was grateful for the strong support Genin was giving her.

While riding in the carriage, Jennie's mind drifted, locked in her thoughts as her surroundings began to change. Soon, as they drew nearer to the palace, she began to dwell on problems, which she had pushed aside 'till now.

An uncomfortable feeling settled down; the looming figure of the palace from the distance left an intangible feeling of dread inside her.

When the carriage stopped, the urge not to get off overwhelmed Jennie. Eventually, she suppressed her desire to stay, and opened the door and got off the vehicle. Naturally, her feet touched the ground, but she continued with her strides—the pain that came with it was the least of her worries.

She looked up at the lavishly decorated entrance. The limestone walls glistened in the sun, the texture of soft chalk.



On both sides, sculptures of the former monarchs guarded the entrance; they had been made long ago by generations of artists, put on pedestals. The fountain that lay in front of the entrance, where the carriage had parked next to, majestically sprouted several clear streams from the centre in beautiful arches. The sun caught the droplets making them appear like diamonds raining into a pool of water. Perfectly manicured hedges, transformed into the shape of various animals neatly outlined the square of the entrance.

However, despite this all, the palace's beauty didn't give her much comfort.

"...."

An ominous feeling rose in Jennie. Something was strange. When the carriage she was in stopped in front of the steep stairs, she had expected someone to come out and greet her.

But no one could be seen welcoming her arrival.  
Jennie hurriedly went inside.

The palace was eerily quiet. Anxiety bubbled in her as she paced through the quiet hallways, but no one appeared to be walking around.

Genin, who was behind her back following her, said in a wary voice.  
"Your Highness, there must be someone in the reception room."

With that, the two headed to the reception room. Jennie, who had been limping, walked towards the open door of the reception room and froze.

What made her pause in her step was the audience that greeted her. From the maids of the royal palace to the handyman who did the kitchen chores, all of them were gathered together in the reception room.

But it was not the sight of the servant which daunted Jennie, rather, it was the man reclining in front of the servants, drinking tea alone. Perhaps it was the aura he emitted, or his vile personality at fault, the man in the middle was intimidating, making those around him quiver.

From where she stood, Jennie could see the servants trembling with their heads tucked towards their chests as if they had committed a grave sin.

The man placed his arm on the back of the sofa lazily and opened his mouth.

"Oh, you came in early."

His sparkling blue eyes narrowed at Jennie.

"I waited for you, sister."

It seemed that her arrival was not at all unheeded—Jongin had been waiting for her.

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## Chapter 33

### Chapter 33 – Unforgiving and Cruel

Jennie felt nauseous—she could barely stop the bile rising up her throat. She knew that soon, Cerdina would be calling for her.

However, it was to her a complete shock that Jongin had been for quite some time, waiting for her. The cup of tea swirled in his hand, had long gone cold. On the elegant mahogany table, appetizers and cakes were left in crumbles.

He looked coldly at Jennie. His eyes zeroed in, observing her from head to toe and taking note of the Kurkan clothing that she wore. Jennie could feel his eyes judging her and it made her shift uncomfortably in her place.

Of all the times, why did it have to be at this specific moment that she encountered Jongin? Jennie gripped her dress tightly. Her own clothes had been torn to pieces, so she had had no choice but to wear the gown that Genin had brought her.

Jongin moved his gaze to Genin who was behind her back. She only nodded at him briefly, and stood still, her expression blank. Jongin chuckled at the disrespectful greeting. He felt utterly humiliated and ridiculed by the escort guard, whom he considered to be in a position far below him.

"I can now see that you hang out with them."

Jennie raised her eyes and quietly murmured, "I only needed their help."

Jongin slowly rose from the sofa and walked towards Jennie. "What help?"

"..."

Pa! Jongin's grimy hand struck Jennie. A mark started to form on the cheek that he had hit.

"I see that's how it is. Choosing to be insolent. I asked you what kind of help you sought from them."

Jennie raised her eyes to meet Jongin's. The place his hand had slapped her, surprisingly, didn't radiate any pain. On the contrary, a piercing, throbbing pain elsewhere in her chest jolted, but she subtly ignored it.

She blinked at Jongin and pushed his hand away. This drew a frown in the crown prince's face. Her apparent rejection, and blunt refusal to answer his question, angered him. He raised his hand once again.

He, whose pride had been scored by Jennie, would not tolerate it one bit. Anticipating yet another slap, Jennie closed her eyes and waited. However, her surroundings became quiet, and the twinge she expected from his grubby hand was nowhere to be felt.

Jennie slowly opened her eyes, greeting the silence. Where Jongin had raised his wrist and prepared to strike her, she found Genin holding it tightly.

"You are the one who is being impolite!"

Jongin frowned as he tried to free his arm, but he could not escape from her firm grip. At that moment, dwarfed by the muscular giant Genin, Jongin seemed to be nothing but a mere powerless bastard. His strength fled. He was vulnerable.

Despite being in the presence of Estia's future king, Genin didn't show any sign of inferiority. To her, pleasing him was a completely futile effort. She had no reason to, and did not have the desire to. Instead, she stared down at Jongin wordlessly, and squeezed his wrist.

"Be careful." She warned, finally relinquishing her strength. The grip on his wrist was released, and she looked down at him admonishingly.

"..."

Jongin massaged his wrist as he glared at Genin. If eyes could sentence death, she would be six feet under. He burned with rage and hatred, towards all Kurkans—exemplified by their defiance and his

inability to do anything.

To his disappointment, however, Genin remained unfazed. Her calm attitude fuelled his spite even more, and Jongin needed an easy target to lash out his rage on.

He stormed over to the side where the servants were lined up quivering in fear and like a snake, slithered his way across until he found one.

The unfortunate victim, the janitor's child whose small body was tucked away trembling in the corner. With brute force, Jongin yanked at the child's collar, grabbing his legs and threw him across the room. Before anyone could react to stop him, the poor boy's delicate body was flung into the air.

CRACK!

The child's head collided forcefully against the edge of the table and his body slammed into the floor. A red liquid stained the table as blood immediately oozed from the point of contact.

"Ahhhhhh!!!"

A horrified scream broke out amongst the maids.

The shock brought Jennie's senses back. The child was motionless, and not even a cry or scream came out from him. She immediately ran across to where he had landed and hugged the boy to her. Luckily, he was still breathing, but in that moment, Jennie only felt horror surge through.

Baroness Cinael, who had stood behind Jongin hurriedly ran to where the two were and took the child from her.

Jennie deeply inhaled as she stared at her half-brother, who was laughing. No matter how deranged he was, he should not have vented his wrath on the child. She could not believe that the very blood running in his veins, ran in her too.

"Sister."

His voice suddenly softened. "My only sister, ruining the reputation of the kingdom. I cannot just standby and do nothing."

Jongin whispered as he slowly blinked his eyes. Those dense eyelashes shielded the evil glint, a hint of his derangement as he took pleasure in his cruelty.

"Do you know the scandal that is spreading right now?"

Jennie clenched her fist tight. Her whole body trembled with anger. She could have endured if he had hit only her, but she could not stand by idly letting him abuse the people of Estia.

Without thinking, her lips moved, and she spoke words which, under normal circumstances, would never come out of her mouth. "You are the crown prince!"

But most of all, you are my brother! She wanted to add. "How could you possibly do this?"

Powerful defiance was directed at Jongin. The stillness of the reception room only amplified her clear and loud voice.

"Did you know what happened to me yesterday?"

"..."

The ridiculing smile that had been plastered onto Jongin's face disappeared. Hearing her words, he stiffened.

But Jennie, paid no heed to his reaction. Despite being infuriated, her breathing suddenly became even. Her hands started to feel clammy as cold sweat dripped from her neck. Forcing her wobbling leg to stay still, she looked up at him.

Jongin was taken aback at Jennie's fierce and glaring expression.

"Don't you dare lay a hand on the people here. These people are all innocent." She managed to spit out those words as her heart, which had palpitated briefly a while ago, began to race. At the edges of her vision, flashes of dots started to appear, and her sight blurred.

Jennie would never relent. For the people, she would defy him over and over again and not back down. Even if Jongin, at this very moment, dragged her to Cerdina, she would keep her stance.

Jongin, who had been looking straight at Jennie, contorted his eyebrows.

"You..." Speechless at Jennie's bravery, at that moment, Jongin fumbled for what words to say in response.

However, Jennie was hit with a severe sensation of nausea and dizziness. Her legs that she had been coercing to keep her up, stumbled. In an instant, her hands came up to cover her mouth as she felt something rise up inside her.

Suddenly, she spat a hot substance. Her palms, which were wet with sweat, reddened. A dark, red lump of blood lay in the middle of her palms in a messy stain. Her tongue tasted the iron that lingered and her mouth dribbled a line of red saliva til her chin.

Jennie stared at her hands and blinked. "Ahhh..."

In the very next moment, her legs gave out. Her body collapsed onto the ground, and Jennie felt her surroundings quieten, welcoming the darkness that occluded her vision.

Pandemonium struck as Jennie lost consciousness.  
"Jennie!!!"

Amidst the screaming, someone caught her falling body.

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The Gypsies were creatures of lawlessness. They were pilgrims who adorned themselves exotically in rich deep textures and gold plated jewelry. Their headwear, made from luxurious silks and lavishly embroidered clothes, were symbols of their free spirit.

They roamed freely around the continent as they were unconfined of the customs. These people, who did not possess anything, nor had ties that grounded them to a certain country, had nothing to lose. Because of this, they acted without fear for anything nor of the consequences that they brought amongst the people.

However, the Gypsies, who were known to be fearless, only avoided one thing—the Kurkans.

Every corner of the continent could be home to the Gypsies, yet one region was left untouched by them. Throughout history, the Western Sand Desert was void of Gypsies. It was uncertain as to why they innately avoided the Kurkans, but one thing was for sure—they were terribly afraid of them.

"Haban."

Liam moved his hand towards a man, who immediately took out a cloth to wipe off the blood from his kings' calloused hands. But the fabric, already stained crimson, was not enough to clean Liam's bloodied palms.

In addition to his palm, the entire body of Liam was covered by blood. The deep liquid trickled down his dark skin, none of which belonged to him. It was a stark reminder of how powerful the man was.

Liam wiped his cheek with the back of his hand and looked at the mess he had made. A low mumble came out as he observed the mess.

"Did I overdo it?"

"I think so." Haban replied curtly. But for Liam, doing it this way was much simpler and faster.

"However, I am more comfortable using my hands. A blade would be too cumbersome to use."

He threw those words casually, as if he had just finished some light exercise. However, the scene before him was terrible. In front of the twisted and torn corpses, Liam calmly took out a cigarette. The tobacco was the usual—wrapped in a leaf, and Ishakan gestured to Haban once more.

A fire was lit, and Liam drew a deep breath, inhaling the soothing scent of tobacco.

The gruesome scene of mangled bodies and splattered blood was a grim reminder of how monstrous the Kurkans were. Their wild nature was revealed at times such as this.

"If you meet the aristocrats of Estia in that state, you won't even be



needing a bribe to resolve the problem."

Haban, who was witnessing the scorching eyes of Liam slowly cool off, spoke up.

"I'm not too sure. I have not yet brought up that topic to them."

Haban gave a low chuckle at Liam's words. Not a day had peacefully passed by, since he had arrived in Estia. The anti-peace party, including Seokjin of Oberde, were trying to interfere with the agreement.

Jin seemed oblivious of the fact that the military strategies he had employed were practically useless. The assassins that he had sent, were also completely incompetent.

In this regard, even the Kingdom of Estia was guillible. Only the Princess of Estia had surmised that the Kurkans were not interested in the peace treaty.

"Anyway, it has become more complicated now because of assassins. We have lost sight of the Tomari."

Haban also took out his cigarette and frowned. They went to this place today because of the Gypsies. However, because of the sudden attack from the assassins, their plans had been rerouted. The Gypsies that they had initially targeted to kill had all fled.

"Tomari is able to conceal themselves and circumvent any tails. With their ability to hide well, once you miss them, it's hard to catch them again."

Haban nimbly chewed the cigar. Tobacco felt bitter on his tongue, but he ignored the unpleasant taste. He fretted as to whether or not he would be able to accomplish Ishakan's plans. So far, his efforts had gone to naught. Liam rubbed off the hair that stuck to his face, and roughly drew it behind his back.

"Can we set up a group of people who will run after them? Do we have enough men?"

"Our numbers are a little bit tight, but I will try." At the thought of seeing their plans go to success, Haban flamed with newfound

motivation.

Amidst the blood dyed floor, the tap of someone's footsteps echoed.

"Genin!" Haban gladly greeted her. However, Genin had no time to respond to his greeting. With a terse expression, she went before Liam and reported. Her tone was faintly tense, and anxious.

"The princess fainted."

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## Chapter 34

### Chapter 34 – A Passing Fling

Liam raised his eyebrows, which prompted Genin to briefly report the events that had occurred in the princess' quarters.

As he heard the story, Liam's eyes squinted and his eyebrows furrowed. However, he did not growl or emit any sign that showed his anger. In a low voice, looking at Genin straight in the eyes, he spoke. "I thought I told you to take care of her, Genin."

The hazy smoke from the leaf cigarette that was slowly incinerating wafted in front of his face. Liam's eyes narrowed, and his blazing golden pupils which had yet to cool down, pulsated.

"But you are here." Liam did not need to say much. His meaning was clear.

Immediately Genin's face paled and drained of its color. She knelt down. On her knees, in front of Liam, she kowtowed and bumped her head on the ground. Her hands were shaking as she committed her admittance to her wrongdoing.

Haban, who was standing beside, could not properly breathe as he looked at the scene in front of him. It was hard to see Genin begging for forgiveness.

"It's okay to make a mistake once, but twice is not." Liam wearily exhaled as he commanded, "Get up. Please be cautious next time."

"Thank you."

Genin bowed down once again, her forehead touching the ground, and then she rose on her feet.

Locked in his thoughts, Liam suddenly mumbled.

"She vomited blood. That is indeed strange."

Haban and Genin glanced at each other. They seemed to come to a consensus through their brief exchange. In Genin's stead, who had

previously been scolded, Haban opened his mouth. The connotation that came out from his words were implicit.

"Was it not because you tormented her last night?" It was a reassuring remark as if there was no truth clearer than this. Liam smiled briefly and shook his head.

"It can be a cause... but I only gave her a puff yesterday." As soon as he picked up his cigarette, Haban's eyes popped.

"Isn't that a poison to humans?"

"It is a medicine for them if appropriately used."

Genin replied to the stupefied Haban. She reassured him that Liam would not in any way, harm the Princess, let alone feed poison to her.

"Right. It is quite suspicious if there is an adverse reaction like vomiting blood."

Liam threw the cigarette that he held in his hands to the floor. The cigarette mixed into the pool of blood.

Liam trampled on the embers of the leaf, completely extinguishing the fire.

His hands curled into a fist and he softly said.

"Do you not think something is happening in the Palace of Estia?"

\*\*\*

Every now and then, Jennie would experience some dizzy spells. Whether it's because of Cerdina being stricter on managing her diet during meals, or her habit of sleeping late due to her busy schedule, she didn't know.

What she did know is that this was the first she had vomited blood and fainted right after. When she finally regained her consciousness, the first sight she was greeted with was Countess Melissa, whose eyes were puffy red due to her endless crying.

"Princess!" the Countess exclaimed as soon as she realized the Princess was now awake. She had called out quite loudly, it was hardly a surprise when moments later, a horde of maids and servants immediately came to crowd all over her, calling out to her in relief.

Countess Melissa helped Jennie in sitting up, gently propping her up against the pillow, as the other maids fussed over the princess as well.

"Princess!"

"Are you alright?"

"Does it hurt somewhere?"

"Do you need anything?"

The questions and concerns continued flitting around her. Meanwhile, Countess Melissa had all but forgotten proper etiquette and decency for she clung dearly onto Jennie's arm. Jacks could only follow blindly at every question thrown at her, growing further and further more confused with the onslaught of voices.

It was a little later that Countess Melissa finally realized her plight.

"Step back all of you!" she immediately ordered, "The princess had only just awakened, give her space."

Despite her good intentions, everyone felt deeply offended. It wasn't that she was wrong, but it was mainly because Countess Melissa was the first to charge in without remorse to the princess' feelings after just being woken. Sensing the irony of her statement, Melissa hid her embarrassment behind a cough.

Baroness Cinael was one who was bold enough to voice her displeasure.

"Can't we even show our relief in the Princess finally waking up?" she asked, and Melissa, to her credit, looked a little sheepish...

"Baroness, that wasn't, how can you-" but the Baroness only cut her off.

"If I recall, Countess, you were the first to encroach on the Princess' personal space! Clinging and yelling gladly at her waking up." she pointed out further.

And after that statement, she burst into tears, prompting the other ladies and daughters in the room to follow suit. One by one they all cried out, filling the space with a wailing noise. Jennie sat up, moving to pacify the crying ladies...

Countess Melissa only wiped her tears away, making the princess lean back once more before steeling her resolve.

"Nonetheless, the princess had only just woken up. Don't you think she needs some more rest before consoling you?" she asked them.

At her words, even the Baroness cannot deny the truth. And so reluctantly the cries died down, silence once more reigning in the room.

With her audience pacified, Jennie lightly brushed her hair to the other side of her neck, which was full of sweat. Then she drank a little bit of the water that Countess gave her and listened to the events during which she was unconscious for.

"You have been sleeping for the whole day." Countess Melissa told her.

After Jennie had collapsed and vomited blood, the royal palace was immediately thrown in a disarray.

Jongin, who had been standing in front of Jennie, had immediately caught her before she hit the ground.

Melissa further told Jennie how Jongin had immediately moved to summon the medics, his face aghast as he carried her.

"He was certainly concerned for your health," she remarked, "Contrary to how he is whenever he was tormenting you."

Melissa shuddered at the thought of him, remembering how detestable Jongin was. Despite her urge to say more condemning things about him, she held back, and continued on until she finished relaying to the princess everything that happened.

When she was done with that, she immediately jumped onto a different topic.

"Though I must say, the barbarians seemed decent enough." she told Jennie, referring mostly about Genin.

Jennie mused to herself how fond the Countess was of her, if by the way she praised the Kurkan was anything to go by.

As she listened further, she could agree that Genin certainly sounded likeable enough.

During the time when Jennie fainted, Genin immediately pushed Jongin aside, who was shouting frantically. She wrapped her arms around Jennie's unconscious frame before she rushed to the bed and laid her there.

She then unfastened Jennie's belt, which constricted the airway and blood flow of her body before taking the lead among the bewildered maids.

But she didn't stop there.

The medics arrived late and could not even properly diagnose what ailed the princess. Genin took it upon herself to step up and assess Jennie's situation. She then offered to light up a strange candle, which she believed would help the princess recover.

And indeed, it worked as the princess had indeed survived.

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Jennie's pale complexion soon turned to normal, and when Melissa saw that she burst into grateful tears! A fact she sheepishly admitted to the princess.

"I really thought something worse would happen." Melissa continued, as her lips began to tremble, and eyes turned watery.

Jennie opted to change the conversation, wanting to prevent any further waterworks from the Countess.

"What happened to Seokjin of Oberde?"

At the mention of Jin, Melissa's expression brightened up as she delivered the news.

"Seokjin was completely humiliated this time." she proudly announced.

"Is there even something that can humiliate him?" Jennie asked, raising a brow in doubt.

"I thought so, too." she giggled before continuing her story in a cheerful manner.

"I didn't know how much drink he had, but he was discovered by the fountain without his pants on. By the end of the banquet, all the aristocrats who were coming out of the hall saw him in such a shameful way." She winced as she remembered that moment.

Melissa had been amongst the many witnesses that time, and thus had provided the princess with a detailed description of his embarrassing discovery.

Apparently, they all discovered him face down, butt naked.

"He also sustained a broken leg, so he might be limping for a while. But we very well know Jin doesn't get drunk that easily." Melissa pointed out, "I even heard that even if he did get that drunk, he isn't one to make such grievous mistakes. So, it's quite possible he was poisoned or drugged with the wine." she mused to herself, before brushing it off as unimportant.

Judging by Melissa's disposition, it's most likely that word of what Jin did to Jennie last night, had not spread throughout the palace.

As his plans were thwarted, he would most likely see it as a defeat on his part. He was shamed, and in front of the aristocrats and Kurkans at that. He will most likely call something for a settlement of affairs after that incident.

She wondered if she should mention it.

But her worries did not last for in the end, it was something she couldn't dare say to Melissa. Even if she were to mention it, she'll



most probably end up spouting hateful words, and nothing she would've done could have changed that.

As she was lost in deep thought, she failed to notice Countess Melissa had gone silent, and now just watched her with nothing to do. There was an awkward silence that enveloped the room, and despite Melissa wanting to say something just to break the silence, she found she couldn't do so.

Eventually the light atmosphere from before gradually dissipated, leaving nothing but a heavy feeling lingering in the air. Melissa hesitated for quite some time, mustering her courage, before she was finally able to call out Jennie's attention once more.

"Princess." she called out, bringing Jennie out of her thoughts.

Jennie immediately could tell there was something she really wished to talk about, but had hesitated so she began talking about it in a roundabout way. Melissa felt her mouth grow heavy as if her tongue was made of lead.

Taking a deep breath, she finally managed to open her mouth to speak despite the great difficulty.

"I, I wanted you to know..." she began, gulping as she tried to force the words out, "I was the one who changed you that time... just by myself..." she trailed off again. Jennie could see from her eyes alone she was fighting through many emotions in that single moment.

"Princess, do you... have you...was there any unwanted advances in your relationship?"

Liam had undoubtedly left marks all over Jennie's body. Aside from the countless bitemarks she's retained, there were also bruising and handprints left on her thighs and buttocks.

The outward appearance of the blemishes around her body might have appeared harsh on an outsider's point of view, that even labelling it with bad romance couldn't even begin to describe it. It was only natural for Countess Melissa to have misunderstood the implications based on her findings alone.

"Oh no, it's not something unwanted." she replied lightly, which only made Countess Melissa bewildered.

"Then, in that case... was it... your partner... one of the barbarians?" she asked, "Perhaps... the King of Kurkans?" taking the fact her mistress might've had sexual relations with them, she immediately amended how she called them.

She couldn't very well continue calling them barbarians now, could she?

Unfortunately, Melissa was only met with silence when Jennie refused to answer further. She couldn't help but begin to fret worriedly about the possible consequences, as she brought a hand up to her lips, one of her many nervous ticks.

Seeing the Countess fill herself with senseless worry, Jennie finally answered the question she was yet to truly ask.....

The one the Countess was really concerned about...

"Do not fret." she said, "You have nothing to worry about my virginity."

It was a vague answer, neither a lie, nor was it an absolute truth.

But if she were to be asked whether it was still intact, obviously it wasn't. She had lost her chastity quite some time ago already. And despite the fact she had planned to end it in a one-night stand, such a thing hadn't been possible.

Jennie wondered if she could even make Countess Melissa, one with such naivety, understand her reasoning.

"And also, I..." her voice cracked, before she cleared her throat as she tried to keep a cool and relaxed facade. "I don't plan on having a relationship with him. It's only a passing fling."

It was as if someone slapped her in the face as Melissa found herself gobsmacked by her answer...

"Pri-princess..." she stuttered, still a little out of it. She couldn't find a right way to respond to the sudden reveal. She only barely managed to whisper to herself...

"What's happening?"

At her stupefied question, Jennie could only look away somberly.

"I too do not know, Countess."

For Jennie truly did not know what was happening with her. She couldn't even understand Liam. His entirety was a mystery, one she couldn't even begin to decipher. At every time she thought she finally cracked the secret to him, he'd go and surprise her every moment, sometimes doing things she hadn't thought he would even do.

For ever since she met him, every reason Jennie had, began crumbling.

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## Chapter 35

### Chapter 35 – Returned Gifts

The secretaries appeared to be running after the crown prince—they tried to keep up with him.

Eventually, the carriage turned to an extravagant-looking neighborhood on the road, still, Jongin couldn't help but seethe in anger, releasing endless profanities under his breath.

As he kept spouting curses into the shelter of his carriage, he finally reached the queen's estate.

"Stay here. I will go further alone." He spat at the secretaries, who flinched and backed away to let him enter the palace alone.

It was to be noted that the queen's quarters were undoubtedly the grandest in the entire palace.

With her quick wit and good eye for learning things, Cerdina had all but chosen the most expensive and most precious of artworks in existence, and placed it all in her quarters. Her room was even adorned, from top to bottom, precious gems and gold.

But even the grandiose of the place couldn't hide the despair and bleakness it reeked of.

Jongin glanced in distaste at every statue he passed by, before pushing the auditorium doors haphazardly across the hallway, uncaring of the scene he was causing.

"The Crowne Prince!"

Count Weddleton exclaimed, shooting up from his seat in surprise as Jongin slammed the doors open. Unfortunately, Cerdina remained unfazed, who greeted the prince rather calmly with a gentle smile.

"Do come in." she invited him in.

There was an expensive fox fur draped across her legs, stopping right by her knees. Her hands gently swept over the soft furs, even as she continued to address the prince rather casually.

"I was thinking of making a muffler out of this beautiful fox you gifted me with." she informed him lightheartedly. She even seemed perfectly delighted, even praising the gray fur, commenting how perfect it was for a shawl!

In a harsh, yet soft voice, Jongin corrected her.

"But that wasn't my catch, was it?" he spat at her, and she only giggled, covering her lips with her knuckles as she smiled at him.

"Don't be such a killjoy, child. The knight who hunted with you might have caught it, but it's equivalent to your catch," she pointed out. She had asked around if the knight was truly his knight, but still she remained seated like the perfect queen she portrays to be. Smiling brightly, with a flawless expression, she looked like an angel, but the tension was thick in the room.

Sensing an argument in the making, Count Weddleton immediately excused himself after glancing back and forth the two monarchs for a moment more...

"I think I better go ahead," he excused, gathering his things, and moved slowly out without any further prompting.

Neither Jongin nor Cerdina did anything to stop him either. Count Weddleton hurriedly escaped from the room. Even the maids who were attending them silently moved out of the auditorium to give them privacy as well.

With only Jongin and Cerdina left in the room, Jongin finally openly glared at her.

"Was it you who did it?!" he immediately demanded for.

"Did what?" she asked, feigning confusion.

"The princess vomited blood right before fainting." Jongin hissed, "I am asking you, if it was you who poisoned her."

Queen Cerdina merely blinked owlishly, her eyelash fluttering softly as she let Jongin throw a fit in front of her. When he was done, she answered in a cool voice...

"Why do you think of that?" she asked in a graceful manner, but it only served to aggravate Jongin more.

"Because it's something you would naturally do!" he spat at her.

"Jongin, my beloved son," she sighed out softly, placing the fox fur aside before she stood up to walk towards him, taking her sweet time, before tentatively pulling him into a hug.

Jongin shivered once she touched him, and found his limbs frozen, unable to push her away. Her hand came up to the back of his head, sweeping down his neck, and then repeated the motions in a placating way.

Her lips moved until she was whispering right next to his ear...

"I thought you said she was yours?" she asked rather coldly, "Why would I meddle in things you own?"

"Mother..."

"Why do you keep worrying?" she asked, finally pulling away to look at Jongin in the eye. His neatly trimmed brows creased to a frown, "Are you frightened of her being stolen? By some mere... barbarian?" she asked, quirked up a brow at him.

"I'm merely worried about her purity." he begrudgingly admitted to her.

"Ah," she said with a soft smile, "So your only concern lies with her indecent activities, and whether or not she's kept her chastity?"

It was quite amusing to see her son worked up. She watched with slight fondness the way he clenched his jaw tightly.

"Fret not, my son." Cerdina told him, patting his shoulder lightly, "Once the negotiations are over, you'll be recognized as the sole heir to the king."

You don't have to worry about it. I can get you whatever you desire.

Those were the very words Cerdina would tell him many times before. Her voice sounded like a lullaby against his ears...

Eventually, he turned away, averting his face away from her. In complete contrast to the rage of emotions swelling up in him from whence, he arrived, now stood a pacified prince. Cerdina looked at Jongin with pity, before she continued to speak.

"You must believe me, it was a shock to me as well when I heard what happened to the princess." she assured him, "And if you do manage to visit her, do send my regards for best health, and to take her time to rest well."

"Alright, but in the meantime, you're to leave her alone," Jongin told her, and Cerdina nodded, waving away his concerns.

"Yes, yes, until she fully recovers I will, I could even rearrange her schedule—"

"What!? No!" Jongin suddenly erupted, pulling away from Cerdina's arms. She looked at him with shock, her eyes widened as her son once again blew up in front of her in rage.

"You do not go near her!" he demanded, "Ever!"

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Cerdina was left speechless as she continued to stare at him in a dumbfounded manner. Eventually, the silence was broken after a tense moment.

"But I'm doing this for you!" she exclaimed, her tone indignant as she talked over him.

Jongin opted not to reply, even as he heard the sharp shrill of her tone. He'd rather choose silence over responding to his mother.

He deemed it wise not to tell his mother of his own view and thoughts with her every decision—whether it was right or wrong.

Cerdina heaved her chest up and down as she looked at him bewildered. Her harsh breathing filled the silence instead as she waited for his rebuttal.

After a few moments, she finally calmed down enough to school her posture once more to the regal Queen she was. Disregarding her

sudden outburst, she gave him another graceful smile, a faux expression instead of what she truly felt.

As the Queen of Estia, she must always be the perfect picture of grace and beauty.

"I would never do such a thing, Jongin." she insisted gently. Jongin only narrowed his eyes at her.

"I shall try to believe you then."

"I shall stay away as she recuperates, just as you wish, but please," she then beamed him a bright smile that did nothing to console his nerves, "I ask you not to take it out on me next time." She let out a breath before she headed to her seat once again, tossing the fur fox in frustration to the floor, contrasting the initial importance she regarded it with.

She trampled on it like a simple rag on the floor.

"Perhaps it's time I talk with those... barbarians." Cerdina spat it like it was something disgusting, before she looked up to Jongin once more with a smile, "Would you like to join me for dinner with them?" she rubbed the heel of her shoes on the fur, wiping the soles off its dirt.

She watched the way the fur creased beneath her feet with a certain amusement, before raising her gaze once more with an expectant smile.

"I sure hope you can hunt a deer this time around." she remarked with a mournful sigh, "I'm quite sick of foxes. Preferably a fine, majestic stag."

Jongin's eyes narrowed the more he stared at the Queen. Their argument never lasted long—eventually, he found himself agreeing to the dinner, playing right into her hands.

"Of course, mother." he quipped tersely.

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Jennie was able to rest for several days after she vomited blood and fainted. She felt anxious whenever she thought of the amount of



postponed work. However, on the other hand, she was also happy that she didn't need to attend the conference anymore.

If it were any normal day, she would have a hard time being dragged into tense situations with Cerdina. Moreover, regardless of her vomiting blood, Cerdina would have ordered her to stand like a doll in the banquet hall to fulfill her duties.

Although, that would have happened if it wasn't for Jongin who prohibited further access in the princess' quarters while she was recuperating.

Jongin had taken it upon himself to inform everyone that Jennie had suddenly fallen ill. He also ordered that no outsiders shall be able to enter the palace.

To prevent anyone from breaking in, he even doubled the amount of guards around the royal palace and even sent chauffeurs to guard her quarters.

Even Cerdina, who was used to belittling the commands of her husband, would not dare defy Jongin. Jongin had known of this fact, so he pressed his advantage against Cerdina. Jennie found everything weird, but she did not think much of it. She just let it go, thinking it was only another one of Jongin's whimsy.

As she was resting in the palace for a few days, Seokjin of Oberde had sent her a huge bouquet of roses and jewelry every day.

His gifts only served to mirror his attention-getting personality.

It seemed to her, he was trying to get back into her good graces, hoping she would forget his sin against her. Jennie found it mildly endearing how he was trying so hard to get her to forgive him by the copious amounts of gifts he'd send her every day.

But despite knowing this, she never made it as far as opening even a single one—Countess Melissa would return to the sender. She'd never even manage to accept even one to take a look. She was merely informed Jin sent gifts.

When asked about why she sent it back, Countess Melissa merely

shrugged.

"The bouquet was too big. I even thought better of turning it into fertilizer before sending it back," she answered haughtily, and Jennie giggled.

"Good. Please do so with any further gifts." Jennie praised, and Melissa nodded.

"Of course! And for tomorrow, princess..." she trailed off, eyes moving to the side skittishly before lowering her voice, wary of the bustling maids around them, "The queen has requested your presence. It seems like she'd be having luncheon with the King of Kurkans."

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## Chapter 36

### Chapter 36 – The King Akin to a Child

Jennie drew a tight smile. She found Melissa to be adorable with the way she changed how she used to call them: from Barbarians to Kurkans. In response, she only gave a soft smile.

"Please relay that I will attend."

She knows she couldn't just confine herself to the palace, even when she had ample excuse to do so.

The agreement was already at its final stage. The peace treaty was not something that would happen overnight, nor resolved easily. Before they could fully enter the treaty in full confidence, she needed more information.

While she was confined in her quarters, she was sending and receiving news through Count Valtein. He would be too busy with his own duties as of the moment to even attend to her.

She also received some news from Laurent of the finance ministry. He informed her that he was ready to propose a new tax reform plan at the next Cabinet meeting.

It was clear that the nobles, including Seokjin, would fiercely protest against this new plan. Jennie did not expect that the bill would be easily approved.

That's why she intended to combine the peace treaty with the reform plan.

Seokjin held the pivotal role among the aristocrats who were opposing the plans. Once the peace treaty is approved, Jin's influence would waver. That's why he was pressed not to let the peace treaty happen.

This is the best course of action as of now.

Jennie and Countess Melissa were talking about the peace treaty when a maid soon entered the office, announcing an item's arrival.

"It seemed that Jin sent another gift." Countess Melissa muttered in irritation and told her that she would come back later. She then left the room, and Jennie, who was left alone, went to stare outside the windows.

Jennie was curious about the tuberose in the garden. Every night, the attractive flowers would be in full bloom, and she wanted to see if the tuberose in the Princess' quarters would also be like that.

Now that she remembered it, Jennie realized that she had not seen him for some time now. But she knew that this was the right step in the relationship between them. It is only natural that they would not see each other in any circumstance aside from public gatherings.

However...

Jennie continued to stare at the window in silence. She didn't have the luxury to be absorbed in her nonsense thoughts. She then turned to stare at the pile of documents on her desk when suddenly the door opened.

"Princess....!" Countess Melissa exclaimed when she came in. In her hands, she held something.

It was a tuberose, around three or four of them, all cut neatly and tied matching white ribbons. As soon as they caught her attention, she found she couldn't avert her gaze away from them.

Giving Melissa a puzzled look, the Countess placed the bouquet on her desk, and drew something from underneath it before handing it over to Jennie.

It was a Kurkan-style dress made of purple silk with colorful patterns.

And with it, a simple note.

Are you alright? It's been hard to meet you.

It was written in the continental language, the strokes of the letters looked crooked and rough. Jennie let out a soft gasp in surprise as she brought her hand up to her lips as she looked at the note.

The message was soft, and the words looked like a child's scrawl, but she found herself smiling. She could just imagine Liam's thick brows

crossed as he held ink and paper on his large hands, trying with all his might to scribble comprehensible letters.

Conscious of someone who might see her reaction, she quickly schooled her features. However, it was too late, for she had already caught the eyes of the maids around her.

Granting her some courtesy, they averted their gazes and pretended to not have noticed anything. Unfortunately, the same couldn't be said to Baroness Cinael, who certainly made a fuss out of the fabric.

"Oh my God! It's a dress of purple silk! The purple silk of the robes worn by the barbarians that time were so beautiful that the nobles were all talking about it... Everybody has been looking for the same thing." She gasped in obvious envy.

She even asked if she could touch the dress only once, her lips agape in anticipation, almost as if she would end up drooling about it. She only regained her senses when Countess Melissa gave her a side glance accompanied with a scowl on her face.

Jennie only got the note and flowers and handed back the dress to Countess Melissa.

"Please return the dress." she immediately said, and a gasp of shock was heard.

"Princess!" Baroness Cinael stomped her feet on the ground, obviously indignant of her decision, but Jennie couldn't afford to accept something so expensive. Especially with the ongoing negotiation, it would look too much like a bribe. But even Countess Melissa refused to take the dress from her.

"But princess, the messenger who brought the gift said that should any of the gifts be returned..." She gulped, looking nervously as she spoke the next words, "Then the king would not attend the banquet any further."

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## Chapter 37

### Chapter 37 – Luncheon

In the end, Jennie decided to keep the dress and not send it back. Since she couldn't just wear it anywhere, she only ordered it to be kept safe until she could decide when it could be appropriately used. With that decision, the maids of the royal palace were able to see and enjoy the purple silk of the Kurkans firsthand.

It seemed that by now, Liam knew how to play her, make her do as he pleased. He now knew what her weakness was, so she was left without a choice but to bear with it.

Even though he had a devious disposition, she couldn't help but feel a strange emotion that she couldn't begin to describe.

Jennie decided she needn't bother delving into an emotion that she could not clearly define. It was a waste of time. But also because she had a gut feeling that discovering it now wasn't the right time just yet.

Even in the beginning, she couldn't divulge her emotions easily. Although everyone knew that she was resting, her busy schedule was still making her keel over from time to time.

It was finally the day of the luncheon. They were all busy since the first light of day.

Since the stop-entry-order in the palace had been lifted, she had to take care of all the work that had been postponed since her accident. Later in the evening, she would arrange a meeting with Finance Minister Laurent and Count Valtein.

Despite the preparations for the luncheon having started early, she took her sweet time preparing for it, contrasting the hustle and bustle for the luncheon the maids were doing.

Since they will eat in the garden, her hair was styled with fresh flowers and accented with jewels. The dress she wore was a soft-

colored dress embroidered with a thread of the same color as the fabric. The design was simple, yet nonetheless elegant.

It was Baroness Cinael's suggestion. It suited her well that all the ladies and gentlemen of the palace admired how she looked perfectly. Even Countess Melissa gave her a beautiful compliment with just a single remark.

"If Count Valtein sees you today in your outfit, he will surely be amazed!"

In the middle of all the unending compliments being cast to her, Jennie put on the finishing touch, her white-laced gloves. With that, she then left early.

However, no carriage was available in front of the Princess's palace. The flustered horseman was only standing and waiting outside. She did not need to ask what happened.

"It's been a while, Princess."

A man pretending to be polite, but was perpetuating an unbelievably rude act, was waiting for Jennie.

Jennie can hear the maids who were following her, as they loudly gasped at the sight of the man, before stopping a few paces behind her.

Either way, Liam smiled at Jennie. His golden eyes were brilliantly sparkling as the sunlight reflected on it. Almost like his eyes was the sun itself.

Jennie blinked owlshly at him, as she observed him carefully.

It seemed that he came alone. Though there was no escort knight around to accompany them, she did not rule out the possibility there is someone who has been hiding nearby and following him, just like last time.

He had been staring at her for while now, deliberately not taking his eyes off her. Jennie only spoke in a confident tone, after making sure he had no tricks up his sleeves.

"Your Highness, how did you come to this place? The luncheon place is not here." she pointed out, feigning curiosity.

Liam merely brushed off the threatening undertone in her voice. It was just as he expected from her.

"I heard that there is an etiquette in the continent that men must accompany a woman of prestige."

He was referring to an escort. However, this time, it was only a luncheon where only a few people will be gathered, and thus needing an escort would be irrelevant. This is especially true for officials like the King of Kurkans and the Princess of Estia.

He probably did not know that the complicated and difficult etiquette should be applied depending on the situation at hand.

No...

The more she thought of it, the more Liam seemed like the type of person who would be stubborn enough to do as he pleased, regardless of whether he fully understood the customs of the place. He did so, because he could.

So instead of pointing out his mistake, Jennie decided to bring up another topic.

"I wanted to return the dress to you." she admitted, and Liam's lips curled up into a smug grin.

"But you can't." Liam kept a gracious smile on his face while looking down at her. "Are you doing this because you want to fully enjoy the luncheon without me, princess?"

Jennie thought that she felt a little bit nauseous. Her heart also thumped a little faster. The black tea she had in the morning was so strong, so she thought it was the reason behind this. Ignoring the stirring sensation, she retorted words in a cool manner.

"Are you trying to appease me like how you did with Count Valtein?" she asked, narrowing her gaze at him.



The maids of the royal palace stood still, watching nervously back and forth between the two of them as they held their breath and gulped. Baroness Cinael only fumbled with the handkerchief that she held in her hand.

Liam burst into laughter in front of all the ladies.

"Winning over the princess through a mere silk dress... Isn't that too cheap?" he grinned coquettishly, and Jennie fought the urge to scoff. His head had been tilted downwards. Since their height difference was one head apart, he could only whisper to her ears by tucking his head and stooping low.

"I only gave that to replace the destroyed dress you had, Jennie."

Suddenly a memory came over her, she could still vividly remember how her dress was ripped off and laid on the bed of tuberoses.

Heat rose on her cheeks.

He stared at Jennie's ghastly white face that was slowly flushing red. It was an amusing sight, witnessing the princess' cheeks change color.

"Will you wear it for me? I carefully chose that dress thinking it will suit you well." his voice dropped, as he spoke to her in a husky tone.

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## Chapter 38

### Chapter 38 – The Audacious Queen

"You know that I cannot do that, right? Why are you getting me into trouble?" she hissed quietly at him.

Liam frowned with her short reply. He stubbornly drew his face closer to her, ignoring the witnesses.

"Is that too much for a man who served you with his whole body?" he whispered.

As soon as she turned her head, even though slightly, the sharp tip of her nose brushed over his cheek.

"I helped you a lot, right? I even almost died." she spat back coolly.

Even if she told him, he would still do the same. Had it not been because of Liam, she would have been caught by Seokjin in the garden that night. Liam snapped and lightly brushed his forehead against hers.

"You should return me a favor, princess." he softly demanded of her.

Jennie eventually took a step back minutely. But despite that, Liam only drew closer to her. The more she ran away, the more he would provoke her.

Eventually, she found she could no longer avoid his gaze, as her eyes slowly looked up to meet his...

When she did, there was a satisfied glint in his eyes. Jennie silently opened her mouth.

"Tell me what you want."

"Walk with me towards the luncheon hall."

Liam playfully quirked up his eyebrows. After sharply looking at Liam in a sidelong glance, Jennie unwillingly moved her first step

ahead of him. She thought of walking ahead of him at a far distance.

Give herself some space away from him.

However, she overlooked something. There was a great difference between their bodies, just like heaven and earth. He quickly caught up with Jennie in only a couple of steps.

"You walk too fast." he jested, and she bit the inside of her lower lip in annoyance.

I can't believe this man.

Jennie scowled at him as he laughed mischievously.

"I came because of you. It's been hard to see you these days." Liam, saying that the princess, who is locked up in the tower, should not be like this. She admittedly finds it cute, though it doesn't quite suit him.

Jennie discreetly stared at him. His brownish-black hair naturally falling down on his broad forehead. The clear line on the bridge of his nose that continues all the way up to his eyebrows gave him a fierce look, contrary to how he gifts her with a softer gaze.

An itching feeling enveloped her hands. It was an unbearably itchy sensation, like the buds that sprout during sprouting time.

Jennie fisted her hands under the white-laced gloves, then moved slowly. Liam walked right next to her, matching her step by step as they walked in perfect tandem together. They were getting nearer to the garden where the luncheon will be held. After all, it was just a walkable distance.

With every step, she thought of the people who would be seeing them, so she chose the road where fewer people would pass by. The maids followed them at a distance where they cannot hear the conversation between the two of them.

The weather was good. Walking under the warm sun felt better than she originally thought. Both of them kept their silence while walking. There was a cozy feeling blanketing them as quietness ensued between them.

It's been a long time since Jennie went out for a walk. Like a cat hanging by the window at noon, Jennie fully enjoyed the sunshine with a relaxed mood. Having a walk outside had never felt this good, possibly because she had only been staying inside the palace for many days.

A thought suddenly occurred in her mind.

It might be possible that Liam knew what happened to her so he deliberately asked her to walk with him outside today. But she didn't bother to ask him for confirmation, and let her thoughts slip away. When they were about to reach the garden, Liam who had remained silent along the way, suddenly opened for the first time since they began walking...

"You look lovely today." He complimented her. His simple statement left her feeling breathless. While Jennie thought of her answer, Liam continued speaking, not waiting for a response. "Did I mention that the Crown Prince will also attend the luncheon?"

There was a deep frown creased on his forehead.

It seemed that he was displeased with the news he let slip from his mouth but he did add anymore, nor ask her what she thought because they were about to arrive in the Queen's palace.

The maids of the royal palace, who were waiting outside to greet her, looked at them with a tinge of surprise. Possibly because they expected neither of them to arrive together. However, the maids only bowed down before them as Jennie passed by, impassive like a doll, without any expression on her face.

"They are waiting inside." the head maid informed them, leading them to the way.

They walked towards the garden as escorted by the maids. She could see, even at a distance, the tablecloth embellished with gold sand. The table was decorated with attractive flowers, small fruits, lace, and petals scattered artfully all over, while exquisite silverware and ceramics lined up—which were all a bit too fancy for a luncheon, Jennie thought.

The nobles were already sitting at the table. At the upper corner of the table, the King and Cerdina were seated, while Jongin, the Crown Prince, was located by the left side of the table. The seating plan was pre-arranged, and Jennie was set to sit beside Jongin, while Liam would be sat across from her.

She paused in front of them, and firmly stood, before giving them a blank stare.

Cerdina drew a smile upon seeing Jennie. The queen's dress shimmered brightly beneath the direct sunlight. The form of flat dress without the balloon effect was undoubtedly not of Estian style. Its skirt fell smoothly unto the floor.

The princess' eyes widened fractionally when she realized what the queen was wearing—it was the silk dress that Liam gifted to Jennie.

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## Chapter 39

### Chapter 39 – Antics and Misfortunes

With a small, soft laugh, Jennie was brought out of her daze. She saw Liam smiling at her, wearing a slightly puzzled expression on his face. He looked at her, the meaning behind his golden eyes was clear.

*Did you give it to her?*

Jennie subtly shook her lowered head. For a split second, a wave of nausea overcame her, which caused her to immediately bring the back of her white hand to her mouth, covering it.

Without a doubt, within the princess' palace, there must have been a traitor. One, who also had a very close relationship with Jennie.

Until yesterday, the princess' palace was strictly forbidden to outsiders. Only those who were allowed in and were close to the princess, knew about the extremely valuable treasures hidden away—tyrian silk. Made from the dye of ten thousand crushed snails, the deep rich purple silk was reserved only for the royals.

In order for the dress to be taken away, a person from the inside of the princess' palace must have intervened. To be exact, it's one of Jennie's maids.

It was a scheme to separate Jennie from the maids of the princess' quarter. Only, it became problematic for them by using such an obvious method they could not escape.

Therefore, this was not the end of Jennie's cover. She'd move on as a royal daughter. Even if they made a decision, there would be a division among the maids. Jennie was not in a position to find out the suspect and didn't know what to do to begin with. She was also worried that Count Melissa, the head maid, would severely blame herself.

Jennie glanced at Cerdina who was smiling. Beneath her cruel smile, she was quietly hiding her sinister intentions, anticipating Jennie's

reaction. Jennie had thought that the queen would grace her by leaving her alone for a while. However, again, Cerdina twistedly started her play, slowly strangling Jennie.

For now, she had no energy to entertain Cerdina. Jennie kept her gaze low.

"The dress is beautiful." An obvious sarcastic voice flew in.

"I didn't expect the queen to wear Kurkan's clothes."

Cerdina and Liam's eyes met. Unlike Liam whose face was void of any emotion, a coquettish smile flitted across Cerdina's lips.

"This is to serve the King of Kurkans."

She was not flustered at all. She stole other people's gifts, and even in front of the gift owner, she appeared confident.

"The peace that the two nations will pursue together will certainly require mutual understanding. I am merely doing what I can, as a hostess from the royal family."

The King of Estia raised his head. His eyes were filled with nothing but admiration for her, upon hearing her speech. The way he looked at his wise wife was full of affection. Jennie bit her lip as she felt her nausea coming back. The urge to vomit was so strong, she could barely suppress it.

Liam's mouth twitched. He was even more irked at Cerdina's shameless behaviour, but surprisingly, reigned in his emotions and endured it. He glanced at Jennie quietly, who was still biting her lips, and headed for her seat whilst maintaining her cool facade.

With her sluggish pace, she silently seated herself. However, the moment she touched the seat, the dizzy spells made her head heavy again.

It was the royal family who were desperately in need of negotiations of amity. There was no reason for Cerdina to make Liam's temper change. Particularly, when Cerdina wanted Jongin to enjoy full power.

Just to harass Jennie, they were attempting to break Seokjin, whilst scraping the peace they held with the Kurkans. This sacrifice was highly suspicious, if not, unusual. It appeared that there seemed to be something Jennie was unaware of. She refocused on her surroundings, and glanced at Cerdina, taking note of her attitude towards Liam during the luncheon. It seemed necessary to properly observe her actions...and, the tyrian purple silk dress...

"..."

She felt strange today. Usually, if it were the same, she would have been able to control her emotion skillfully, but it was hard to do so. Useless impulses kept flaring up out of nowhere.

Right now, Jennie wanted to get up and slap Cerdina in the face. She wanted to yell at her to take it off right away because it's hers. These were thoughts her usual self never had.

Since she had become close to Liam, had her nature changed? The powerless royal daughter and the king who reigns over the western desert are worlds apart.

Jennie glanced across the table, towards Liam who sat indifferently. The chair seemed a little small for him. In comparison to those seated, his large and tall stature dwarfed everyone.

He was watching Cerdina. His eyes were subduing a certain impulse that stirred. A dim flame lit in his golden eyes. Despite being relatively subtle and soundless, the air around him was heavy. After all, such a frightening man was in front of them. Waiting on him was the Estian servant who had been assigned to attend Liam. He looked ashen as he battled the intense nervousness and fear of serving the great man before him.

The expression Liam wore was ghastly, and his sharp eyes felt like daggers that would pierce one and root them in place. Feeling Jennie's gaze, he suddenly turned his head. Immediately, the golden eyes that flickered with embers of rage, and were sharp as a blade, softened at once.

Jennie realized. Liam was enduring Cerdina for her.



In his mind, he also had the urge to strangle the Estian queen. The image of her body lying face down on the grass with the dress torn to shreds seemed appealing. After all, it was an insult to the dress to be worn by her, tearing it would save it.

However, Liam breathed out calmly. If he acted on impulse, Jennie would be in trouble. So, he had no choice but to keep his rage at bay.

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## Chapter 40

### Chapter 40 – Caught in the Act

The delicate atmosphere at the luncheon was thin ice that could be shattered at any moment. Between Jennie, Liam, and Cerdina, a silent war raged. The subtle desire of each person to advance or protect the other was concealed by their facades.

Only the king, who was oblivious to everything, burst into a broad smile and announced the start of the luncheon.

A small bell rang out and an appetizer came onto the carefully arranged table. The day was warm and coming from the garden the scent of flowers was fragrant.

The dishes prepared by the palace's cooks were also sincere enough to be admired. They contrasted the tension in the air. The precarious balance dancing at the edge of a cliff, could easily be toppled over.

The king and Cerdina led the conversation at the luncheon. Liam did not actively engage in it, but he responded moderately to what they said.

"It seems like Estia and Kurkan have been engaged in a useless war of attrition. If we had a chance to talk earlier, peace would be what we have in the present."

"It's indeed a pity, for our two nations to have sacrificed so much," Cerdina let out a light scoff, apathy apparent in her tone. Jongin, who was silently bringing his fork to a rest after finishing his food, twisted his mouth and laughed.

The luncheon continued with amble talk, and after the appetizer, the next main course was brought in. Jennie, who was tasting the first dish, grilled herring with soft sour cream, felt as if a thorn had been lodged in her throat. She found it hard and painful to swallow, despite the smooth texture of the cream.

She hoped Jongin would not mess with Liam, who was enduring for

her, without causing a scene.

"...?"

Something touched her foot. Unconsciously, she looked at the other side and Liam's eyes curved into a slight smile. His twinkling, bright eyes, were full of mischief, Jennie could only guess what he was up to. She nudged him back, her foot bumping into his shoes.

It was an outdoor garden, so the table at the luncheon used was a small one. With roughly eight people sitting around it, the table seating was strategically placed. It was a royal family strategy, for diplomatic means. The most important people were seated closest; by narrowing the distance, intimacy in their mutual relationship was emphasized.

Considering Liam's build, he was tall enough to stretch his legs to the opposite side. Perhaps he had bumped into the chair because it was a little small for him.

Jennie's eyes widened as she was wondering if she should tell the servant to change the chair. However, her face heated up, thinking of the consequences. To her sheer horror, calling it a mistake at this point would be an utter embarrassment. The movement beneath the table had turned increasingly explicit.

A gentle touch pushed Jennie's shoes away. Her shoes came off, slipping from the smooth silk socks she was wearing.

The shoes, which had been dangling from the heel, escaped Jennie's feet and disappeared somewhere. She tried to wear them again by reaching out her feet in a hurry, but only stepped on the soft leaves of grass.

Her foot stumbled about on the grass, looking for her shoes, when suddenly, a weight gently bumped the tip of her foot. The toe of a solid, well-made shoe, gently touched Jennie's foot. She could feel the cool tanned leather under the silk that separated it from her foot. Then, it lightly tapped again on the top, so as not to hurt her, but enough to leave dirt.

Jennie drew her feet towards her and looked down. A black stain was drawn before her eyes on the white silk socks. Jennie cupped her toes, heat flaring up in her cheeks. Looking at Liam with her rosy cheeks and heated neck, she was slightly angered by his small antics. He seemed to be delighted that he could make fun of Jennie and seeing her in trouble made him chuckle.

Again, she scuffled her feet and begged with her eyes, pleading him to not tease her like that. However, her moment of relief was short lived. Soon, a tickling sensation arose from her ankle. A soft light touch traced her bone, as the hard shoe cap gently slid up her calf and down again.

A strange tingling sensation arose from her lower abdomen. Without even realizing it, her thighs were shaking.

"Are you sick?" Jennie, who was distracted by what was happening under the table, was surprised. Next to her, Jongin was furrowing his eyebrows.

"Are you sick? Don't make me ask twice." Jongin whispered to her lowly, an expression of concern flitted across his face.

From observing how red her face had become from the heat, he had misunderstood Jennie to be sick. It was because he recalled how he had recently seen the scene of her throwing up blood and fainting in front of him.

Across them, the king and queen expressed no interest in the situation occurring, as they were too busy exchanging gazes and words of affection with each other.

Jennie looked up and across her, feeling the gazes of Liam and Jongin, she managed to lick her lips.

"...No."

Her hands kept shaking, so she clasped the tableware tightly. She wanted to reach under the table and push his legs away, but it was etiquette to keep both hands on the table throughout the meal.

"You look sick," Jongin stated. His hand reached out to touch her

cheek.

It was at this time, that the shoes that had been drawing circles on her ankles, dug into her skirt and swept up her calves. The immediate change in position and cool toe cap against her smooth calves caused her to take a small breath and stiffen.

" ... "

Jongin narrowed his eyes thinly. Slowly putting his hands away, he picked up some silverware lying in front of him and dropped it to the floor. The servants in the back ran and tried to pick it up, but he gestured to them, waving his hand briefly and personally bent down.

His action of picking up the tableware was slow, however, when he straightened his back again, clutching the silverware, Jongin's face was horribly distorted.

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## Chapter 41

### Chapter 41 – When Patience Runs Out

"...hah."

An abrupt scoff squeezed out from behind his clenched teeth. On the back of his hands, lines of blue popped. Jongin had seen the explicit play happening under the table.

His blood was riled by the provocative exchange he had witnessed between Jennie and Liam. In a fury, Jongin contemptuously discarded the tableware he had picked up to the quivering servant, who had been waiting anxiously since the crown prince bent to pick up the piece of porcelain himself.

It was the first time he had seen the royal do that, and the expression that crossed Jongin's face afterwards had been frightening.

With a nervous and humble posture, the servant immediately brought back new tableware for him. Jongin, who had begrudgingly received it, could not forget the image he had seen. His hands grasped the cool white porcelain tightly. His grip so strong, at any moment, it seemed the tableware would break under pressure.

Unlike Jongin, who was struggling to contain his rage, Liam slowly drew his cup towards his lips and smirked. His posture was ever so relaxed, that one could easily tell, he comfortably fit into the luncheon.

Judging from his attitude, it seemed that Liam had deliberately acted as such, for Jongin to see.

The next moment, Cerdina cocked her head and glanced towards them. Her gaze narrowed at the servant, an apparent expression of dissatisfaction spread across her face. Her eyebrows furrowed distastefully—it appeared that the queen had seen Jongin picking up the tableware himself.

For a prince to act lowly in front of the esteemed guest present,

Cerdina inhaled sharply and shot daggers at the innocent trembling servant, who feared to even look directly at her eyes.

Jennie could not find her shoes, which had peeled off. She blushing hid her feet deep inside her dress, hoping that would stop Liam from touching her provocatively again.

Liam laughed lowly, a glimmer of amusement in his eyes. His low rumble tickled her ears and made her want to hide herself. She felt a nudge beneath the table, and quickly slipped her feet back into the delicate shoes Liam had stolen away.

Jongin grasped the knife in his hand, the tense grip made it difficult for him to cut up his meal. The aromatic lamb dressed in thyme and smoked lavender that had been served, laid untouched.

He seemed to be trying to put up with it somehow. But the moment his eyes met Liam's, who was smiling leisurely across the circular table from him, he eventually, with a rough gesture, laid down the tableware again.

The furious prince, who had been ignoring Liam up to this point, spoke to him for the first time.

"Does the food suit your taste?"

Amusement flashed across Liam's face. He seemed to be having fun, taunting Jongin. He stared at him as if asking if he wanted to try it.

"I heard it's hard to get ingredients in the sand desert, but I'm worried that unfamiliar food might not suit your taste."

Although Jongin's words implied that the food Liam was eating was far more precious than just a normal meal, Liam's expression remained the same; relaxed and carefree. He was a king after all, no matter how rare the food, what was there that he could not get? Liam briefly opened his mouth, and drawled.

"That's what I'm saying. More than I expected..."

He tilted his head, eyes turning to look at Jennie.

From her large amethyst eyes, to her small nose, pouty lips and small chin, he mapped her face in his eyes. Traveling further, he reached where her porcelain skin met the neck of her dress, which was gently wrapped around her shoulders, like a silk cocoon.

He's eyes ravaged her, examining every soft curve, and texture of the beauty before him. Soon, he reached for a serviette cloth, intricately embroidered with lace. The tip of his fingers leisurely wrapping around it as he brought it to his mouth.

"...so much better."

It was strange to learn of the affection he could express with the light, pleasant and calm tone. For someone who was an absolute beast in the sheets, and knew how to use his masculine body to make a woman feel good, he was surprisingly gentle. With an indescribable like in his eyes, he whispered.

"I want to stay in Estia for a long time."

The grind of teeth could be heard from the opposite side of the table. Jongin's eyes flashed deadly pale.

The noble sarcasm that had meant to humiliate Liam in the Estian society, had not even laid a small scratch. In front of a man who was the fierce embodiment of a beast, sharp words were weak; all bark but no bite to him.

At this point, even the tactless Estian King seemed to recognize that the situation had taken an odd turn.

The king looked at Jongin and Liam in bewilderment.

However, the king had long been out of the minds of two men. Jongin who completely was caught up in his anger, forgot everything that told him to remain silent. The delicate nature of the political situation before him vanished with his anger, and he opened his mouth, fury in his eyes.

"I heard that the King of Kurkans has not yet married."

He uttered what he should not say. "Will you plunder a bride in



Estia?"

Surprised, Jennie grabbed him by the forearm, but he immediately shook off Jennie's hand.

"Jongin."

Feeling the seriousness of the situation, the Estian King also called out his name and warned. But despite the warnings from his family, Jongin refused and ignored them.

"At least I hope the king won't do that."

Jongin ended his words by twisting his mouth into a sneer.

"It is considered a barbaric act on the continent."

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The luncheon atmosphere felt like it had been doused by ice-cold water, sending chills to those onlooking. Although the continent despised the Kurkans, calling them barbarians, the remark was said behind their backs.

One would never dare to say it in front of them, much less to their king!

Cerdina stared at Jongin, shocked by how upfront he was in the presence of Kurkans, let alone Liam.

In the freezing tension, bright golden, yellow eyes and frosty blue eyes collided with each other. An internal battle raged as Jongin glared down at Liam.

A relentless hatred conveyed in his glare.

"I'm saying this out of concern."

Liam, who had never lost a fight in his life, was not the type to avoid Jongin's provocation. Instead, he chuckled at Jongin, who openly brought out his claws and emanated hostility. It was a smile that looked like the tease of a playful young child.

He tilted his head back slightly and raised his eyebrows.

Seeing his languid gaze, Jongin clenched his jaw, preventing the string of venomous words to leave his mouth. He utterly despised the man before him.

"Estia doesn't seem to have much intention of making friends." Jennie looked at Liam with trembling eyes, but his gaze focused on Jongin, missing her. "I thought you had the same goal, but now, I don't think so."

The relaxed laughter disappeared. With his mouth closed in a straight line, in his golden eyes, a storm gathered.

"Is today's luncheon to interrogate me?"

"No." It was Jennie who answered on behalf of the Estian family, breaking the silence.

"Misunderstanding, my king."

"..."

Liam turned his gaze slowly. He looked at Jennie with an expressionless face.

Knowing the weight of the situation, Jennie quickly covered up for Jongin. "The prince wants peace with the Kurkans more than anyone else. He's the one who is abolishing the slavery of your kind."

She did not know what Jongin or Cerdina were thinking, but she was desperate to keep the peace in Estia.

Jongin opened his lips to say something but stopped when he felt Jennie clench his forearm. Fortunately, he kept his mouth shut again.

"However, he made a slip of the tongue as he is not particularly good at expressing his feelings." She breathed a sigh before continuing, "May I ask for forgiveness on his behalf?"

Everyone knew that everything Jennie had said was pure flattery, in an attempt to pacify the disrespected King of Kurkans. It was just a

matter of whether he would decide to accept the apology or not.

Soon, Liam, who was staring at Jennie without even blinking, raised a question.

"...is it the prince's work to investigate slavery?"

"That's right."

Liam belted out a laugh, as if he was in a jovial mood. On the contrary, Jennie went silent. There was no way that Jongin would be interested in the Kurkans nor the slave trade. It was all Jennie's work.

But as always, what Jennie accomplished became Jongin's contribution.

This arrangement had become natural that Jennie had become used to being robbed. Her whole life was not hers.

Liam glanced at Jennie, and lowered his voice softly.

"This is the second time, princess."

It was a pointless answer. But only Jennie understood.

"...Thank you."

For Jennie's sake, Liam endured again. Patience was not a virtue of the Kurkans, especially one of Liam's status. She was already at a loss of what to pay him for controlling his temper for her, twice.

The luncheon continued again in spite of the unsettling atmosphere. The formal conversation was cut short, and no one mentioned the heated exchange, which transpired just moments ago. The servants waited carefully, not daring to move lest they make a mistake and disobeyed. They were treading on thin ice.

Jennie finely cut the aromatic lamb into small pieces. It was as if a stone had been lodged in her throat. She couldn't swallow; it felt painful to even gulp. Her appetite had completely disappeared, but she kept on filling her mouth, keeping herself busy.

Suddenly, a soft voice spoke up.

"Jennie."

Her body became stiff as the queen called her.

"How's the food today?" Cerdina smiled brightly as she said so.

She then leisurely used her silver fork to dip a piece of lamb into an herbed sour cream, then popped it into her mouth. It was a warning from the queen.

Hence, Jennie laid down the tableware as she watched Cerdina eat. She was unconsciously overeating, her way of steering her attention away from Liam.

Her heart had calmed down. For several days, because of her sudden illness, she was able to eat to her heart's content without Cerdina's interference.

Of course, it was ridiculously small compared to a typical meal, but it was far beyond the queen's standard.

"Isn't the princess eating too much?"

This was said with the intention to humiliate her.

Glutton.

"I don't think I eat a lot," Jennie, and dipped her head.

"Ah, the food must be terrible." The moment these words left Liam's mouth, Cerdina let out a disgruntled sigh. It was a luncheon hosted by the royal palace. The fact that the food was flawed was no different than an insult to her.

Jennie looked at Cerdina nervously. The queen's facial expression went sour since Liam's exchange with her beloved son.

"Is it because the king doesn't like it? We should have prepared some Kurkan food, but I wanted to show you Estia's culture, so..."

She smiled, sweeping the silk dress which glimmered in the sunlight. Liam was thrilled, he found her character ridiculously amusing, that she dared steal his gift to Jennie.

"I even thought of wearing Kurkan clothing. Ah, I'm ashamed."

There would be no third time. Liam was no longer patient. His large bronze hand picked up a glass of wine, the deep rich contents swirling a brilliant red.

He rose from his seat and then, without hesitation, tipped the glass over Cerdina's head.

"Argh!"

Cerdina screamed. Her perfectly rouged face and plated hair were soaked with alcohol. The dress she was wearing also had a large splatter stain. The precious clothes that could not be bought, even with a noble household's wealth, was ruined.

"Oh, dear."

Cerdina shot daggers at him. The wine dripped from her hair, and down her chin. She was completely drenched.

What's more, Liam still had the nerve to wear a smile. Amusement and irritation dancing across his golden eyes.

"It's my fault, Your Highness. I'll send you a new dress."

But unlike his smiling mouth, his eyes were cold.

"This time, in a color that suits the queen."

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## Chapter 42

### Chapter 42 – Get Lost

Cerdina blinked. Then, like a gaping fish, she slowly parted her lips and then closed them again.

Speechless, her eyes twitched in irritation.

The situation at the luncheon was a complete mess. Jennie watched blankly at the scene unfolding before her—her mind was too shocked to process the catastrophe that had erupted the moment Cerdina had provoked Liam and pulled his last thread of patience.

In all honesty, this was indeed an anticipated occurrence. From the instance Cerdina had stolen Jennie's dress, her action had ignited a fuse. The blatant disrespect and deceit, was merely the match that had lit the ticking time bomb.

No matter how desperate Jennie was, her attempts to amend matters were futile. The eventual clash would occur between the two parties, regardless of the efforts she made to delay the future. Her pleading attempts to pacify the King of the Kurkans, were only used to buy time. In the end, the explosion would still inevitably happen.

Droplets of crimson red dripped from the edges of the crystal wine glass. Liam slowly placed his glass down, and a scornful smile spread on his lips. His eyes directed pure hatred at Cerdina, and their meaning was clear.

*Get lost.*

Meeting Liam's eyes, Cerdina stiffened. The man before her had a frighteningly powerful aura, and she stuttered in his presence.

Staring down at her pitiful state, Liam let loose words of sarcasm.

"That dress, I thought it didn't suit you."

His statement was a clear insult, with nothing but contempt portrayed in his tone. All Cerdina could do was dip her head and

raise the corner of her mouth. Her deep red lips curved into an arc as she projected was the most elegant and beautiful smile, that tried to conceal her previous daring actions. The pure image of her bright smile, mixed with the smell of alcohol, was, in this strange atmosphere, like an oddly grown weed in the outdoor garden.

Cerdina raised her hand in an elegant gesture, and beckoned towards a maid. Then, she stood from her seat and spoke refinely to Liam.

"I will take my leave for a moment to change my clothes."

With the support of the maids who hurriedly came to help their mistress, Cerdina left the luncheon, without a falter in her step. The king, who remained alone after suddenly being abandoned by his wife, glanced around nervously at the luncheon.

His eyes landed everywhere, except for Liam. The coward king was so tense, he could not even fault Liam who had been so openly rude with his actions. The King of Estia, was exactly like a puppy, who had lost its master.

Indeed, he was most undeserving of the title: King of Estia. The little dignity that he had left in him to hold him upright, even that, was now ruined. A leader like him, could only lead their country to one fate: ruin.

Jennie's eyes flitted to the king. In front of her, she felt the weight of her family bearing down, on her shoulders, heavier than a crushing boulder. Her heart knotted up, constricting with frustration at the mess she now had to deal with. An aggrieved sigh left her lips.

How foolish are you? This negotiation decides the fate of the country, yet...rather than helping...I can't believe you are ruining it...

Even if the King of Estia begs for forgiveness and kneel in front of the King of the Kurkans, it would not be enough. Mercy was too gracious, and on top of that, the pride of the Estian royal family would be an obstacle in their way.

A dreadful solitude sunk in. Jennie felt like she had been thrown into a warzone. On both sides, a brutal slaughter was ongoing, and no

matter how desperate she was to stop their madness, her shouts landed only on deaf ears. In the wild plains, the echo of her voice did not return, even when her throat became hoarse and bled.

Enveloped with misery, Jennie slowly rose from her seat. She saw that there was no reason to remain in the luncheon any longer. Everything had been ruined, and because that, it was better for her to leave and do something else than senselessly kill time here.

When Jennie was about to move, a shadow loomed in front of her.

"Princess."

The man who had been dealt continuous disrespect, extended his hand towards Jennie. Slowly, she looked up at him. Her eyes travelled his large frame, until they reached his eyes, then his hand. The size of his hand was almost twice as large as hers, yet within those fine lines, were so many possibilities.

Hesitantly, she raised her arm, intending to place her fingers in his large palm. However, she paused.

She was not sure what future it could lead to if she did so, and therefore, she could not bring herself to readily accept him.

Seeing her unsure, Liam did not press her. He only calmly observed her, waiting patiently as Jennie froze. Her mind was clouded, her emotions conflicted.

At times such as this, Liam, was strangely patient.

Even though he was such a man, to use force and act recklessly to gain what he desired, this was a side that he showed only to her—care and patience.

Sensing that being with Liam was better than staying here, she reached out to hold his hand, when suddenly a stern voice interrupted.

"Sit." Jongin coldly spoke. "Where are you going? The luncheon has yet to end."





## Chapter 43

### Chapter 43 – Unquenchable Thirst for Power

Jongin was still sitting upright at the table, using the lifeless luncheon, as an excuse to make Jennie stay. "I said don't go, Jennie."

However, Jennie did not reply to him.

Unable to endure her lack of response, Jongin kicked his seat. His eyebrow twitched; it was clear that he was furious at Jennie. Great bitterness swept across his face, as her disobedience caused unstoppable rage to surge through Jongin. The always compliant Jennie, had dared to defy him. His fist balled up and he slammed the table, clattering the plates as he tried to intimidate her into staying.

However, it was already too late. Jennie's hand was already extended towards Liam. As soon as her fingers touched his, Liam immediately entwined them. His grip was so powerful, that even she was astonished. Liam grabbed her hand, his grip was stable and assuring, and pulled her to his chest.

In the blink of an eye, with a few powerful strides, they had left the table of the luncheon and the garden.

Jongin, still wrapped in his wrath, tried to chase after them. However, his hand which had tried to steal Jennie back, missed by mere inches, before Liam had whisked her away. Nothing but hollow, cold air met his skin.

"..."

Releasing his grip on the air, Jongin brought his fist down, and clenched so hard, his nails dug into his skin and pierced his flesh. However, he ignored the pain. It was nothing, compared to the feelings of turmoil and rage that consumed him in that moment. For a minute, his eyes grazed over the empty spot that Jennie had sat, moments before. His icy blue eyes trembled intensely, directing all his hostility towards Liam, at the chair.

It was his last chance. As Liam dragged Jennie out of the garden, Jongin reacted and shouted at the knights who stood guard at the luncheon entrance to stop them. However, it was too late.

Coupled with how long his legs were, the distance they covered with their speed increased, and soon, the garden where the luncheon was held, was nowhere in sight.

In front of the maze of the palace, they stopped in a corridor lined with marble pillars.

The sons and daughters of nobles who were playing nearby, noticed the intense figure of Liam dragging Jennie, and realizing that they were figures of importance, quickly dispersed like ants doused with water.

Their surroundings immediately became silent. Even a pin dropping would be audible.

Liam looked down at Jennie and breathed out, finally releasing his grip on her wrist.

The moment his hot hand let go, Jennie hid her hand behind her dress, however, Liam noticed her action and instantly drew it to him again.

His hand had left reddish marks on her white, slender wrist. Even though Liam had tried to grip her gently, Jennie's skin was so pale and fragile that the grasp Liam had thought was light, had handprints on her skin. She was truly made of glass.

"Why...!"

Caught in the middle of surprise, Liam stopped his words as his voice rose sharply. He brought his hand to his face, covering his eyes, as mixed emotions ran through him. A loud sigh left his mouth and he disheartenedly murmured.

"You should've told me it hurts."

When Liam said that, Jennie realised how distracted she had been. His grip, though left marks, did not hurt her at all. Those little things

were insignificant to her.

She raised her head and her light violet eyes met Liam's deep golden ones. Her lips opened and spilled out the words she had intended to say all along.

"I deeply apologize in lieu of the royal family."

However, Liam roughly stopped Jennie, nudging her. "Stop." He commanded.

The sun that glowed in his eyes, pulsed as his pupils dilated. A swarm of emotions ran through them.

"You're not a sinner. Why are you always being so apologetic?"

A sense of frustration and anger crashed down on him. Each time he interacted with her, it was like a wave upon wave of intense fury. However, the reason behind this was far different from what Jennie was thinking.

"What the hell did Estia do to you? Is it not enough to sell you to Seojin? You're a damn shield..."

From what he knew, in Liam's mind, only Jennie had made any effort in the luncheon. She alone had held herself trying to maintain an amicable relationship; only she had selflessly thought for her country.

Rendered speechless, and unable to fathom her actions, he tucked his head and whispered lowly.

"Is the kingdom too important to you? To the extent of protecting the Crown Prince?" Liam vehemently tried to control his raging emotions. It was only for Jennie's sake that his anger quelled. Jennie chewed on her lips, without uttering a single sound.

He raised his hand and tilted her chin up. "Why did you not say anything?"

His thumb grazed over her lips and pressed, parting her mouth. Jennie almost bit his fingers but stopped herself in time.

"If you feel wronged, you should also express your anger. Shout, say anything. Even if you're not..."

Hearing his words, the stirring emotions that had been dead, came to life. Even if she had thought she could bear it, her lips moved on its own accord.

"...What would change if I do that?"

Nothing. There's absolutely nothing that it would change.

Even if she acted wronged, even if she became pitiful in front of him right now, Liam would still leave regardless. Their lives were worlds apart. And then, Jennie would be the one to take care of the mess he had created after he left.

Even though she knew that... Tears clogged the back of her throat. The turmoil she felt in her heart, pierced it like jagged thorns. She was strong but delicate at the same time.

Jennie blinked and inhaled the cool air. The musky scent of manliness from Liam wafted into her nose at their close proximity. She tried to reign in herself, warning him.

"Don't sympathize with me if you will not take any responsibility."

"Sympathy? You're talking nonsense." He said in gritted teeth.

"Is that not our lovemaking?"

"..." As if his words were jarred in his throat, Liam remained silent. Jennie broke loose from his grip; it was as if she were freeing herself from him, both emotionally and physically. As Jennie turned back, Liam grabbed her again.

"Let go of me!"

However, Liam did not release her. Jennie struggled, hitting his chest, and trying to twist away from his body. She hated Liam for toying with her. For bothering her and creating a mess for her to clean up. For disrupting the peace she had tried so hard to maintain.

But above all, she hated herself for letting Liam drag her around.

The difference in their strength was like heaven and earth. Liam simply overpowered her, forcing her to give up on her incessant struggle.

He opened his mouth, his voice cracking. "I..."

Jennie glared at him. The golden eyes that were filled with anger a while ago had subsided.

"If I say that I'll take responsibility..." Her strength left. The fight inside her dissipated as she held her breath.

As if he were under a spell, Liam fixed his gaze on Jennie, unblinking. The next words that he uttered with cautiousness was a confirmation of their relationship.

"Then, what will you do?"

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Jongin only stared unmoving at the empty chair.

However, no matter how long he looked at it, he knew she would never return. Time would not unwind, and the person was no longer here.

His teeth bit down hard on his frozen lips, and words of resentment came out.

"Huh...darn it."

Even though the king was seated right next to him, he could care less, and cursed.

**BANG.**

The table shook as he poured his rage, clattering the porcelain tableware. Untouched sandwiches and delicacies toppled over, crashing into the other food on the table. A wine glass rolled over and smashed to the floor.

The sharp piercing sound of glass colliding with the ground and shattering fuelled Jongin's fury.

Immediately, he grabbed the edge of the cloth, and dragged the whole thing off the edge of the table.

Along with it, came all the tableware and finely served food.

**BANG!**

**CRASH.**

**PANG!**

Jongin cursed and threw the remaining glasses and plates everywhere. Sharp forks and knives flew behind the maids on standby. However, they fortunately were able to dodge the onslaught of silver.

No one was able to stop Jongin.

Even the king did not say anything and only witnessed his actions, anxiously. It was only when Cerdina returned to the luncheon that Jongin, who was venting his anger, ceased his destruction.

In a new, elegant dress, and a powdered face, Cerdina came back looking in her usual regality. She no longer smelt like she was drenched in alcohol, rather, the essence of jasmine from a fragrant perfume emanated off her body.

Regaining her elegant composure, she returned to the luncheon and looked at the hollow seating where Jennie and Liam had once sat at. But they had long disappeared, only Jongin and the king remained.

Seeing her son like this, she pressed her hand on her chest.

"Jongin..."

The king, who was overjoyed upon seeing her return, was not even acknowledged by Cerdina. Only Jongin was in her sight. He panted heavily, and slowly raised his eyes to meet hers.

"I certainly thought it was mine, but apparently, it wasn't."

He muttered with trembling eyes. The state of insanity he was in, was clear as day. "It seems that even if I were to become king, I cannot beat him. It's not enough to just be King of Estia."

His eyes shone, a wicked delusion formed in his ice-cold irises. His pupils dilated, overflowing with crazed delirium. A smile stretched across his lips, distorting his face.

"If only I had more power." The sinister tone that underlies his voice conveyed his evil intentions to the full.

At his statement, Cerdina's eyes widened. However, her reaction was not because it pained her to see her beloved child suffering.

Rather...

"Yes, my beloved Jongin..."

Overwhelming joy filled her as she whispered her agreement, understanding his thoughts immediately. Such was their bond between mother and son.

"The lack of power is indeed a great embarrassment. Hence, be greedy, be ambitious and seek power."

"Mother..."

Cerdina lovingly smiled at Jongin, who was engulfed with emotions—self-inadequacy and envy. She fuelled his wicked desires, with sweet words of support. An atmosphere of false affection sank on the luncheon that had been completely devastated just moments before.

"You will be seated in the highest position in the continent, Jongin."

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## Chapter 44

### Chapter 44 – Plans of Rebuttal

Jennie knew that she should have prevented Liam from continuing. His words were pointless, and in this situation, politics and love combined would only lead to one thing—disaster.

Neither of them could find the proper words to say.

It was a tug of war. The delicate line could be crossed at any time, but neither was willing to let go of the rope.

Even if he sounded implausible, some parts of her wanted to believe him. She wanted so bad to place her trust in Liam.

However, she only felt ridiculous. How could she possibly trust the enemy of her country? Their goals were clashing against each other, and their hearts divided for their own people. On one hand, Liam was the most powerful king of the Kurkans, whilst on the other, Jennie was all but a helpless princess, trying her best to save her country.

She was a fool. Every time she was with him, she always became like this. Her normal reasoning and logic vanished in front of him, replaced with the temptation and emotional impulses.

To do what her heart desired was what she wanted the most—to wear the beautiful purple silk dress Liam had gifted her, to enjoy her meal in peace at the luncheon in an amicable atmosphere.

She desired to claim the glory of her contributions, wished for people to recognize that it was her who strives to abolish slavery and not the crown prince.

Such simple desires that Jennie had been repressing because of the etiquette and discipline she had to abide by.

Ever since she had met him, Liam had only been inciting the rebel in her. The unkindled feelings that should have passed without a spark turned into huge flames.

It was hard to withstand the burning urge to let herself go, to sate those innermost feelings and unbridled desires.

Liam was the fuel, powerful enough to cause the spark to erupt into a blaze, against her wishes.

When Countess Melissa heard what had happened at the palace, she became immensely upset, for Jennie's sake. The situation regarding the purple silk dress especially, made her extremely troubled. Such a gorgeous and delicate dress, that money could not buy, was stolen and ruined before Jennie could even touch it.

Melissa wanted to immediately find out the culprit, but the princess pacified her first.

"I have my reason as to why I told you about this. I wanted to get over this issue."

"But, princess...!"

"As the head servant, I want you to take the lead, so the maids will not become divided. I know what I'm asking of you is hard, but..." Jennie held Countess Melissa's hand and looked up with her deep violet eyes. It was a plea.

"..."

"If there was a maid who sold me out to earn a fortune, I'm certain it's because of inevitable circumstances that caused them to do that. I will leave soon anyway... No matter what the queen does, we just have to put up with it."

Countess Melissa did not answer and only sealed her lips tight. With a ashen face, she forced herself to open her mouth.

"How can they not let you rest?" Her dry, wrinkled hand covered her face. Melissa remained silent for a while.

"...If only I came from a family with more power."

The words that she whispered seemed to be full of remorse. Whenever something bad happened to Jennie, Countess Melissa had

always blamed herself.

She felt so sorry for the princess, and the countless injustices she had to put up with.

"Countess."

"I apologize. I spoke improperly in front of Your Highness."

"No, I am the one at fault here. I am undeserving to have you." Jennie approached the countess and opened her arms. Countess Melissa immediately hugged Jennie.

Sighing deeply, she uttered, "No, I am unworthy to have a master like you. You are the only one I have, who I can count on."

"Don't be like that, Melissa."

"Her Highness might ask me to serve another master once you leave the palace, but I hate the idea."

Jennie faintly smiled as if she knew what Melissa was saying. Countess Melissa was prepared, wanting to change the topic.

The princess' destiny was already written in stone—she was promised to Seokjin and people were already anticipating the reunion. Melissa could?never change this. This was the power she lacked and faulted herself for.

Jennie recalled her final choice—death over a miserable life ahead of her—and prayed that it would not bring Melissa too much misery. As soon as she thought of her upcoming repose, a voice suddenly popped out of her head.

"If I say that I'll take responsibility...then, what will you do?"

His words lingered in her head, like a troublesome bug leaving her restless. It kept flying around her steadily, no matter how hard she tried to shoo it off.

His voice, eyes, and nose atop shapely lips...The gentle and sincere expression on his face—everything came to life in her mind. She

could trace his smooth jaw, the arch of his brows, and deep-seated eyes with her own.

Recalling these unwanted memories, a realization struck her. All along, her heart had been wanting something... She wanted to live.

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The aristocrats of the society, who mingled amongst each other in the hall, were greatly satisfied of the gossips surrounding the scandalous welcome banquet for the Kurkans.

The gossipmongers indulged in the story between the King of the Kurkans and the Princess of Estia.

Just the thought of Estia's flower, and the young and strong barbarian king interacting, was enough to make a controversial picture.

The royal daughter, with her vivid violet eyes, was a noble figure envied by all aristocrats—especially of women. There were quite a few nobles who were dissatisfied with the fact that she had even become the fiancé of the old but powerful Seokjin.

"But the barbarian king appeared like fresh meat! Everyone is looking forward to seeing Seokjin boil in anger." Count Valtein was so excited that he bragged about the gossip of the social circles.

"Your beauty is outstanding, but I do not know how Kurkans perceive Estian beauty. I am interested if they find me..."

Upon noticing the glare of Finance Minister Laurent, Count Valtein stopped with his bragging. Even if his tongue remained itching to speak, he ended up halting and changing the topic.

He took a small velvet box wrapped in a pink ribbon out of his pocket. Then, he proceeded to untie and proudly opened it as he nudged it towards the center of the tabletop. The inside contents were revealed, laid out on peach tissue paper.

It was an unfamiliar sight to the person being presented it with, Minister Laurent.

Count Valtein puffed his chest with pride and arrogantly spoke. "This is the latest trend." He held the box as if it contained a mysterious and precious jewel.

"Date palms?" was the minister's confused reply.

"Yes. Would you like to try one? This is dried palm that Kurkans eat. I had a hard time looking for this."

Count Valtein flamboyantly displayed his expertise in date palm eating etiquette. "Eating this is quite difficult. You must learn the proper way! Trying it once or twice without the correct technique will waste the dates. I assure you, many are unaware of this method."

The unique and interesting goods piqued Finance Minister Laurent's interest. He took the fork he was using for refreshment, picked up a date and ate it.

Then he drank the tea straight away.

"Oh no, it is quite a bit of sugar..."

"It's not sugar! Date palms are naturally sweet."

Despite the count's rebuttal, Finance Minister Laurent, could not easily iron out the frown on his forehead. Count Valtein smiled as he watched the minister drink his second cup of tea.

Even though Valtein detested sweet things, he had eaten two dates already—just like season, his taste bud changes. Jennie, who was with them, could only look at him in astonishment.

"I think this is popular nowadays because it is good for one's vigor," Valtein continued to praise the sweets.

"..."

While they were eating, Liam's memory of eating the dates suddenly popped into Jennie's head.

Imagining the man, she hurriedly shook it off.

The culture of Kurkans was getting popular in Estia these days. The foreign customs had been quite appealing to the aristocrats who were awfully fond of new entertainment.

From the ruler's perspective, it would not be favourable. However, the more one tries to suppress the people from doing something they wanted to try, the more they found it fascinating. Thus, preventing the Kurkan culture from becoming a trend was not an option.

All they could do was wait for the Kurkans to return to the desert after negotiations took place, thus taking the trend with them.

Count Valtein offered the dates to Jennie, but the latter only refused to eat them. She instead sipped some lightly brewed black tea and raised the main topic she wanted to tackle.

"What happened to the favor I asked of you?"

"Yes, princess." Count Valtein immediately put down his teacup. "I found out the Kurkans are currently moving in Estia with three divisions."

The first was tasked to meet and appease the key figures of the kingdom. They had already seen this in action. The Kurkans had taken the initiative to approach Count Valtein.

The second was to track down gypsies and arrest them. In the first place, the relationship between the Kurkans and the gypsies was already marred. However, there appeared to be more than meets the eye for their conflict.

"The last one was the same as what the princess had expected. They have been looking for the Kurkan slaves that had been captured here in Estia."

Jennie nodded as she heard the words of Count Valtein. Slavery was illegal. However, in the face of money, the law did not exist. There was an immense demand for Kurkan slavery, they were strong and valuable. Slave dealers would illegally capture them, and sell them off, making a fortune.

"Therefore, did you do what I instructed?"

"Of course. It will proceed as you wish."

A smile grew on Jennie's face. Upon seeing her satisfied expression, Count Valtein brightened like a child who had just been praised.

"Count Valtein did a great deed for us. Because of that, it gives us at least a chance to get out of the negotiations." Finance Minister Laurent spoke his opinion with a dark face.

"However, is not the negotiation too hard to achieve right now? That incident at the palace, which should not have happened, did after all." After hearing the catastrophe that had occurred in the queen's Palace, she had almost given up.

It wasn't because she couldn't understand the Finance Minister. In fact, it was only normal to react that way.

"We should try utilizing it well. As you are aware, we cannot just idly stand by and do nothing."

Jennie looked at them one by one. She clearly stated her next thoughts, emphasizing how important it was to be on good terms with the Kurkans.

"The treaty is the last chance for Estia."

"..."

Count Valtein and Finance Minister Laurent sighed heavily and nodded in agreement.

Minister Lurent seemed to contemplate deeply for a while, before speaking up.

"We are already helpless once you go, princess. Even if we could negotiate the deal, how can we lead a decaying country among ourselves?"

"I cannot properly sleep these days because of that. Does the queen really think that the Crown Prince can handle all of this?"

"Maybe. Perhaps it is because the Crown Prince himself is atrocious

and ambitious."

"I do not know why the prince behaves so foolishly, while his mother behaves like a fox."

Count Valtein, who was unintentionally complaining, immediately checked his surroundings.

He had just insulted two of the most powerful people in Estia in one statement.

After confirming that the maids were nowhere in sight, he laughed mischievously, like a child caught acting suspiciously.

"I think that the queen will regret it once you are gone. She will be hitting the soil, full of remorse, and immediately summon you back."

It appeared that they were not alone in their thoughts. The Minister of Finance, Laurent furtively nodded with Count Valtein's passionate speech—saying that Jennie should not forgive the queen even if she knelt on her knees.

Count Valtein only stopped babbling after Jennie raised her hands. She softly sighed and he wrinkled her nose, confused as to whether he had stated something wrong.

"Count Valtein."

His eyes were wide open as he listened to her words that followed.

"I'm thinking of locating the slaves by myself."

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## Chapter 45

### Chapter 45 – Breaker of Chains

The mist of clouds fogged the night. The haze covered the moon, so not even a single beam of light was able to seep through the sky. Deep darkness fell over Estia, shrouding the place in mystery. It was a night where one would be uneasy to go out alone.

A small lamp lit the road in front of the carriage. Its flame was blazing, however, it was not enough to make the pathway visible.

The horseman at the front of the carriages in line, swiveled his head, cautiously keeping watch of his surroundings with his eyes. After many years of experience wandering, he knew enough to recognize when one should never ignore their intuition.

Today, the horseman felt unusually unnerved. He felt an irresistible urge to flee from the carriage and escape into the night. He wished to quickly get out of the dreary forest they were passing through, but the dense trees seemed to be infinite.

Since a while ago, the mercenaries who were escorting the carriages, had been feeling the ominous atmosphere of the surrounding forest. They kept a constant grip on the sheath of their swords, should any abrupt attack occur.

"Bloody hell!"

The horseman cursed as he pulled the horse's bridle to a stop. He tried to whip them several times, but the horses did not slow down. They continued to whine as if frightened by a ghastly creature.

He was helpless, only able to look ahead of him, terrified. Suddenly, a sharp whistle whipped through the air. The horseman's eyes bulged at the sound, realizing too late what it was.

"Ahhh, it's the barbarians!"

He yelled out a split second later, however, the black shadows fell from the sky. They climbed atop the carriages, like crazed beasts, in a

cunning attack.

Their bright eyes glowed horrifyingly in the dark, and from the light in their eyes, the protruding teeth of their grin could be seen. A satisfied smirk was plastered on their faces.

The mercenaries shrieked and pulled out their swords. However, their reaction was nothing against the Kurkans, who, like lightning, jumped down from the carriage. As quick as they had come, in the next second the sounds of flesh tearing and bodies thudding to the ground was immediately heard. The cracking of bones followed, as the Kurkans wrecked a blood bath amongst the mercenaries.

"Ughh..."

The horseman barely managed to crawl out of the carriage. Around him, all kinds of horrific sounds of pain and slaughter pierced his ears. The shrieks were haunting. He covered his mouth with his hand whilst trembling, forcing himself to not scream. Suddenly, a whoosh of cold air hit him as the carriage that hid his body was turned over.

The smell of death permeated the frigid air. Only corpses lay around him. He watched as his mercenary companion looked up at the sky and then spurted blood, the last the mercenary saw being faces that were just like his. With a thud, the horseman watched, terrified, as he collapsed to the forest ground unmoving. It would be where he would be buried. The mercenary's hot blood flowed to the soil beneath him slowly, his body grew cold.

Against the occluded moon, the silhouette of a man with a muscular build was illuminated. He languidly glared at the woman who stepped over the bodies, ignoring the frozen horseman and peaked inside an upturned carriage. Undoubtedly, if one saw his bright topaz eyes, they would recognize him as the leader of the pack.

"Liam."

A giant woman handed a tobacco leaf to the man.

While she was nursing the others, a slender man diligently searched the wagons with the other Kurkans. The man who had been

confirming the faces of the slaves one by one with a lamp to illuminate them, suddenly exclaimed.

"It is not here!"

"...Another vain attempt?"

The man grew silent for a moment as he smoked the leaf tobacco, the aftertaste was soothing in this quiet bloody night. He slowly muttered as he released the smoke of the leaf tobacco.

"Amazing. I was pretty sure that it was accurate information that was provided though."

His head tilted and he locked his gaze on the horseman. The moment the horseman was observed from afar with those piercing, blazing eyes, he was rendered mute in fright. Even if he wanted to scream, not a single syllable could be uttered. His legs were stuck against his will and he could not run from the fear he felt.

The horseman felt a warm liquid drip down the inner parts of his thigh, it seemed that he had soiled his pants with urine.

Liam smirked. His golden eyes glinted as he raised an eyebrow at the horseman, taunting him like a predator.

"Do you know anything about this?"

The horseman's teeth chattered. He shook uncontrollably, as he faced the terrifying man before him, however, he knew if he were to stop here, the forest would become his burial ground. The words spilled out of him in a mumble, as he forced his mouth open to utter coherent syllables.

"T-the other slave dealers..."

"Did another slave dealer buy and take away the Kurkans?"

"Y-yes..."

Liam narrowed his eyes. He was locked in his thoughts and cocked his head to the side. Then he looked up and nodded his head at the

woman on the side.

"Please spare me. I am just driving the wagon...This should probably be enough to pay for my sins."

The woman curtly nodded her head and suddenly raised her fist. **THUD!?** She struck the back of the horseman's head. Immediately, he fainted without a sound.

Liam, who was staring at the horseman in front, briefly asked.

"Is he dead?"

"You did a good job of controlling your strength, Liam." She gestured to their surroundings.

Haban fidgeted in response to Genin's naive answer and added.

"I think he's dead."

"No. He's not dead yet."

As their shallow quarrel ensued, Haban proceeded to check the pulse of the horseman. There was nothing interesting to conclude.

"He's not dead."

Haban dubiously tilted his head and clicked his tongue. Genin raised the tip of her chin, beckoning him, as if to affirm her strength. Liam, who laughed at their silent bickering, smoked his tobacco and said.

"Is he the third?"

Haban stomped his feet as he spoke with a red face.

"It certainly doesn't seem like a coincidence."

Currently, Liam was tracking the Kurkans enslaved in Estia. He had already found out the whereabouts of the Kurkans who were sold to aristocrats and wealthy merchants.

Amidst catching the Kurkans, who were in danger of being caught and sold, they unexpectedly encountered multiple difficulties. Each

lead would result in failure, by mere hours. It was the most frustrating difficulty they constantly faced in tracking them down.

It was confirmed the Kurkans were bought and the queue of slave dealers was pinned down, however, following the route of their trade was a maze. Each time, the reason was the same. Another slave dealer would buy the Kurkans right before they could free them.

This was the third time they had missed the opportunity, by a short time interval.

"I think that someone must be moving one step ahead of us."

Haban tightly gripped his two fists as he heard Liam's inference. Liam tacitly pacified Haban whose self-esteem was hurt.

"It's not your fault, Haban. It's only because even the Tomaris might be interfering too."

It was difficult because the gypsies were also after the slave dealers. Nevertheless, Haban did his best.

"This situation is far greater than merely your inability. Rather, it's because someone else is acting fast. They're moving quickly so as to avoid us catching up." Liam appeared to be thinking deeply.

"I don't know what kind of slave dealers they are. How about solving these guys first?" Haban took out a leaf cigarette and put it in his lips.

After puffing the smoke, he talked. "How could we find them?"

"We move faster."

Haban's eyes widened in shock. He faced Genin with a confounded face and carefully asked again.

"...Are you okay? We are doing our fastest while keeping our moves discreet."

"There's no choice. We have to be inside the auction house, and find them there. We have to be early, at least an hour before them."

Liam laughed. As he smoked through the darkness, he could see how much blood would spill on their attack, how much blood would paint his hands.

Genin, who knew their king's ferocity in fighting, specially against the people who enslaved their kind, looked at him with her brows raised.

In response, Liam said in a tone which made the air more chilly.

"What? You know that I'm good at self-control, right?"

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It was the first Cabinet Council meeting since the Kurkan's Welcome Banquet. Only Jennie was present on behalf of the royal family at the meeting.

The king had said that he was tired, and the Crown Prince did not attend because he was preoccupied with a hunt. This was a frequent occurrence though, so everyone was accustomed to his absence.

The atmosphere of the Cabinet Council meeting was tense. It was as if a knife had sliced the air. Finance Minister Laurent breathed in deeply, and cleared his throat. The tension on his face was clear as day.

"We must make a reform on the current tax system."

The moment that he spoke the opening sentence, the whole committee erupted into chaos. Jennie glanced around the conference hall, her stoic blank expression concealed her thoughts. The majority of the council members present, heavily objected to the idea. Stating it was complete nonsense and a reform was useless to the Estian economy, they unilaterally opposed.

"Whether the bill will be passed or not, it will be decided after the peace treaty. Today, the explanation for the reform..."

As the Finance Minister continued, the mood that settled over the conference grew darker. Everyone deep in their own thoughts, racking their brain on how to deal with the peace treaty. It was a

delicate relationship that could be broken unfavourably at any moment, towards Estia.

Jennie scornfully laughed deep inside. She knew that this meeting was a deliberate act to give them more time. Until the reform plans were approved, after the negotiations took place, the opposition party needed to gather their strength.

Jenni was determined – she had to put an end to this. That way, peace could be maintained for a long time even without her being present in Estia. It would be her last duty towards her country. After the motion for the reform ended, Jennie opened her mouth. Her voice spoke loudly and clearly in the midst of the tumultuous discussion in the meeting hall.

"There is one thing I need to inform all of you."

The aristocrats stopped talking all at once and turned to face Jennie.

"We are going to step up our surveillance of the slave traders and launch a major crackdown. This is also to successfully achieve a peace treaty with the Kurkans."

In normal circumstances, the aristocrats would grumble about why they had to care about the slave dealers for the Kurkans. However, today, an atmosphere full of sympathy arose. Some even suggested finding the Kurkan slaves and releasing them themselves.

The reality was that everyone had received a bribe.

Jennie carefully identified the aristocrats who had been hostile to the Kurkans in the past but had suddenly changed their stance. It seemed like she had to focus on them.

After the cabinet meeting ended, the aristocrats gathered and talked, furthering an elaboration of the discussions that had taken place prior. Jennie also had a conversation with the Finance Minister Laurent and Count Valtein.

"Thank you for your hard work."

"It's alright, princess..."

She comforted the rather haggard finance minister. Laurent stroked his chest as he said. "My mission will not end here. Are you going to the slave traders tonight?"

Jennie nodded, answered back a 'yes', but Count Valtein drew a disgusted face as he secretly whispered.

"Seokjin is coming. He is coming."

Indeed, Seokjin of Oberde was walking forward on crutches. He diligently approached Jennie whilst limping. They were currently in a place where other aristocrats were gathered, so he probably came here on purpose to show others that his relationship with Jennie was fine.

The Finance Minister and Count Valtein stepped back with a disgruntled expression, allowing Seokjin of Oberde to approach them. He looked up, a nasty grin on his face and casually greeted the three.

"It has been silent for a while."

"..."

He was indeed a shameless guy. She wondered how someone could be so impudent. Jennie silently looked at him. However, Jin did not feel bothered by Jennie's defiance. He continued his idle talk, taking up their time.

"Securely lock your bedroom tonight and fasten the latch of the window. It would be better if you put a pane on it. Place lamps around your area in the Royal Palace, and command your maids not to sleep..."

She was amazed at the way he was babbling. Jennie could not stand it anymore and cut him off.

"Seokjin of Oberde. What do you want to say to me?"

Jin was enraged. The implication behind Jennie's words echoed to him: "Go away."

"Is this not the fault of the barbarians in the Royal Palace? You are all



fooled because of their gorgeous shells!"

He then swiveled around and raised his voice. "Aren't the aristocrats too, busy praising and following the barbarians?"

The statement was meant to catch the attention of the aristocrats present in the conference hall.

"The peace treaty—don't so foolishly proceed with such a ridiculous thing. Princess, you are naive. You are unaware of how superficial a treaty is, merely pen on paper. It is insignificant and will not be of value."

When Jennie only stared quietly at him void of the reaction he wanted to incite from her, Seokjin's forehead creased.

"Anyway, I will send my knights over to the Royal Palace. I shall order them to safeguard you through the night, so please accept one guard today."

Then without bidding his goodbye, he turned and left, rudely leaving behind his advice.

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## Chapter 46

### Chapter 46 — Auction House

"What was that...?"

Count Valtein, who had previously stepped back to allow Seokjin to join them, approached Jennie and spoke.

"Did he also hit his head when he broke his legs?" Valtein asked incredulously for the behavior he had just witnessed.

"I think so. He's even thinking of sending his knights to the Royal Palace! No matter how much he ignores the royal family, that's too much."

Count Valtein then explained that for such matters, there were universal laws and orders. All of which Jin had just broken.

He had stuck his nose into the affairs of royalty, where he was not wanted, and neither was he needed. At his side, the Minister of Finance also became angry at the blatant disrespect and intrusion.

However, unlike the two who were angry and cursing quietly, Jennie only had a scowl expression, not verbally addressing the matter.

This was not the first time Seokjin had committed such an impertinent act, nor it was the second! The fact that he continued to do so disgusted her. He was completely contemptible and arrogant, assuming his flirtation with Jennie would be successful.

Although they had not yet wed, he acted as if Jennie was a trophy of his possession. She sighed in despair. This was her destiny, and for her country, she had to endure it.

However, Jin had been treating the Kurkan badly.

He hated them deeply, refusing to call them anything but 'barbarians' and cursing his kind to the tomb.

But despite all this, Seokjin's knew the Kurkan better than anyone

else. Therefore, his rude words to them were not meaningless. There must have been an incident that had caused even the bold and shameless Jin to be so horrified.

However, the Kurkan who had been captured as slaves had never shown any unusual behavior. Perhaps it was a Kurkan who was not enslaved.

Therefore, it would have been good if Jin had shared with them his current information about the fascinating race, but he had already left the conference room.

"First of all, let Seokjin from Oberde do what he wants." She ordered with resignation.

Since the treaty negotiation would soon be over, Jin should be stressed out right now. Therefore, it was better to let him get away with it and not cause additional problems. It was also one of the ways to assure him that he could still use the royal family as his puppet.

Besides that, if Jin stubbornly pressed, the royal family wouldn't be able to stop him. It would be bad for them to oppose him directly.

Even when Jennie had returned to her quarters, Seokjin's words that seemed to warn of an impending disaster continued to pop into her head.

She could not forget them, and throughout her afternoon schedule, she reflected on those words.

After a simple dinner, Countess Melissa met with Jennie alone. Jennie intended to go out for the night, so she had to prepare.

As usual, Countess Melissa had combed Jennie's hair today. The delicate and thin strands of her hair crossed each other in a braid. The braids were held together with pins, and she cleverly hid her silver braided hair with a brown wig.

Jennie looked at herself in the mirror and suddenly, the memory of the time she had slipped away from the royal palace came to her mind. Back then, she had also worn a wig and discreetly left the walls that confined her. From that point on, her life was thrown into chaos.

It was the first time she met Liam.

"Princess?"

Jennie came to her senses when Countess Melissa called her. Her motionless, unemotional stance worried Countess Melissa, who feared the princess was ill.

Every time Jennie had slipped out of the palace, Countess Melissa was anxious. She couldn't help but think that something serious might happen to the princess outside the palace walls. She looked like a mother, watching her daughter venture out for the first time, leaving the safety of the nest behind.

"Do you really need to get involved in this?" Countess Melissa expressed her concern and care for Jennie.

"As you know... the Count cannot solve this alone." Jennie responded, shaking her head gently.

Instead of rebutting, Countess Melissa just gently patted the dust off the robe Jennie was wearing. Jennie smiled softly as she looked at the Countess' pretty disgruntled face.

"I leave it in your hands, Countess," Jennie smiled.

"Of course. Don't worry, Princess. Please come back safely." Countess Melissa nodded her head, her eyes telling Jennie she could trust her.

After saying goodbye to Countess Melissa, Jennie entered a hidden passage that was hidden behind her bedroom closet.

The cold wind hit her when she finally emerged from the dark and secret passage. The oil lamp she was holding faintly illuminated some steps in front of her, as she reached the door to the outside of the palace.

Jennie looked up at the sky. Unlike yesterday, which was overcast, tonight's sky was clear. The moon in particular, was exceptionally big today. The round white moon floated in the sky, emitting a comforting light as if it were a commander, superior to all the stars.

On a normal occasion, seeing this view would make Jennie think it was simply beautiful. However, perhaps because of the words Seokjin had spoken at the Cabinet Council meeting, she felt that the silvery rays of the moonlight were sinister and gloomy.

Then, a fog covered the full moon that she was staring at.

Finally, she began to move. She couldn't stay still in this place forever, because she had a task to accomplish.

A black carriage without the family crest was waiting for her near the entrance of the one that had appeared. When she gently touched the window of the carriage, the thick curtain inside the window moved. After confirming that it really was Jennie from the inside, Count Valtein opened the door.

"You have arrived. Now we are leaving."

"I feel safe knowing that you are here. Perhaps if I were alone, I would feel very uneasy... Please accept this." Count Valtein murmured.

He pulled out the mask he had prepared for her disguise. It was a simple black mask, but it was big enough to cover her whole face. With his help, Jennie put the mask on securely, completing her change.

"I wish we could end all this today."

"Yes, I hope so too. I get nervous easily, so I hope I don't do anything wrong."

Count Valtein said quietly. His heart was pounding with nervousness, so much that it seemed to be about to explode. The auction in which they would participate today was very big and infamous, where several slave traders gathered to show their merchandise. The massive participation meant that the number of slaves at the auction was far from small.

In fact, the news about the large-scale repression that had been announced that same day during the Cabinet Council meeting, had already begun to circulate within the circle of the slave traders.

Jennie had purposely leaked that information to force the slave traders to start a massive auction before the investigations began.

Jennie had worked hard to provoke today's auction, hoping that her efforts under the table would bear fruit.

"Don't get too nervous, Count Valtein."

Although she was reassuring Valtein, Jennie was also nervous. After all, they had been preparing for this for a long time. If today's operation failed, future plans would become even more difficult. No matter what the circumstances were, they had to succeed.

The carriage went to a discreet and antiquated mansion located on the outskirts of the capital. The two-story mansion with a garden, did not have a large size. Joyful melodies were heard coming from the interior. The stage was like a common dance hall.

However, the atmosphere at the back of the mansion contrasted sharply with the front. The guards, armed with exposed swords, fiercely guarded the door. Their terrifying stature spoke of the secret and illegal events that took place beyond the steel bars.

The carriage stopped at the back door. Count Valtein took a deep breath and then got out of the carriage first. Then, he helped Jennie out of the carriage.

The guards looked menacingly at Jennie and Count Valtein. Their wild, unconventional glances made Valtein tremble. Yet Jennie was with him, and this mission, which had not even begun, depended on this very moment.

Then he took out a gold coin from his pocket and showed it to them. It was a special coin that was imprinted with an insignia that allowed them the right of entry. The guards checked the pattern on the front and back of the coin, then placed it on a scale to weigh it. It was perfect. The coin balanced the weight of the pendulum precisely.

"Welcome."

With somber faces, the guards opened the door and received them politely. As soon as they entered, an employee appeared to help and

guide them.

The first floor of the mansion was mediocre. The interior was decorated with simplicity, nothing interesting to see for the casual observers. However, as they went down the stairs leading to the basement, a complex corridor appeared. It was a maze in which anyone could easily get lost, if not guided. Count Valtein whispered quietly to Jennie.

"This inspection seems to be getting more thorough. In fact, it is quite frightening." After saying those words, he immediately closed his mouth.

The couple and the guide walked through the maze.

Finally, after a long time since they descended, they were escorted to a very brightly lit reception room. The reception was well organized and decorated, very different from the insipid first floor. The two saw a table with diet soda, tea and wine.

The clerk abruptly left them both and returned to the maze. Count Valtein went to the drinks and started drinking wine to moisten his tense throat. Suddenly, someone knocked on the door, and soon after, a voice was heard from outside the room.

"Can you give me a moment? There's something you should check out about today's product."

Count Valtein immediately lowered his glass and stood up. He put on his mask, which was slightly crooked, and spoke solemnly.

"I'll be right back."

As she stood alone, Jennie looked around the room. The furniture was luxurious even though it was a temporary rental place. She looked at the furniture one by one as she waited for Count Valtein. The black tea, which she hadn't had a sip of, had gone cold long ago.

The floor clock was ticking, as the minutes passed. After confirming that the cup was cold, Jennie got up from the old armchair she was sitting in, waiting for Count Valtein...

"....."

Count Valtein was taking too long. Without hesitation, she headed for the door. As her hand reached out to grab the doorknob, she suddenly smelled a sweet, minty scent.

A whispered instruction came from behind her back.

"Stop."

When she was in the room, Jennie didn't feel even the slightest movement, much less the presence of another person.

A cold tingling sensation ran through her neck, when something sharp touched her. A small and sharp dagger was pressing against her delicate skin. Even the slightest force, would cause the blade to tear his skin immediately.

The low voice immediately commanded him.

"Do not move."

Before she gave that order, Jennie was already frozen. That strong and unique male smell was something she would recognize anywhere. The familiar smell and deep voice made her heart skip.

"Turn slowly."

Jennie slowly turned around. The man standing in front of her suddenly hesitated, torn between pulling the dagger from her neck. Moments later, he pulled the blade away from her skin then grabbed her chin sharply. After a moment of silence, he slid Jennie's mask off.

"...Jennie?"

Liam stared at her with a puzzled expression. Jennie couldn't respond and just blinked her eyes. She wasn't ready to see him again. Her heart was pounding as if about to burst, due to this sudden and unexpected encounter.

"Why are you here...?"



Liam could not take his eyes off her. He was clearly agitated and murmured in surprise.

"Have you been kidnapped?"

His golden pupils turned cold at once. Before Liam turned the auction house upside down, Jennie quickly opened her mouth.

"No, it's not that..."

Her tongue felt heavy. She couldn't find the right words to express herself. She was lost in thought and could only whisper to Liam, who had a terrifying expression.

"I have business to attend to in this place."

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## Chapter 47

### Chapter 47 — Slave Trader

"....."

Silence filled the air. His mind seemed unable to comprehend Jennie's words, which left him speechless. After a few moments of contemplation, Liam slowly came out of his confusion, understanding her words. His golden eyes fixed on the small face in front of him, and he managed to open his mouth.

"...Do you have business to attend to in this place?"

Liam's eyes turned to the black mask that had fallen to the ground. When she removed it from her face, he never imagined that the princess was hiding behind it. The pupils of her golden eyes were slowly narrowing, turning cat-like.

He turned again to look at Jennie. His fierce eyes became narrow slits.

"You have to give me a convincing explanation, Jennie."

He turned again to look at Jennie, still wearing his fierce expression.

Jennie took a deep breath. She felt as if a weight had been placed on her chest, prohibiting her from breathing freely. In front of this man, she became rigid and could not breathe properly. Jennie could feel a burning sensation under his touch, where his warm hand was planted on her arm.

She calmed down and opened her lips, looking directly at Liam. However, nothing came out of her mouth. Her tongue felt heavy, unable to move. Fear left her speechless. She could not speak.

"Ahm."

Liam breathed a sigh. Then, when she least expected it, he wrapped her in a tight hug and sat her on his lap. The delicate princess of Estia was once again, beside the King of Kurkan, as she had been many

days before. She could feel the warmth emanating from him, warming her up.

Then he ran his fingers over her frozen cheeks. Her high body temperature felt good on her face, returning her pale skin to a bright pink color. Liam's sharp expression, slowly softened.

"I think I overdid it." He whispered softly.

The sensation of his warm breath reminded her that she had to breathe. Jennie realized how loving this man had been with her. The true nature of the Kurkan was like the sharp claw of a beast. At any moment, they could reach out and cause serious harm. Therefore, Liam's behavior was quite unusual.

The way he looked at her contrasted with the expression he had when relating to others. He had a weakness for her, despite being a man capable of making others cower out of fear.

"I know you're not that kind of person."

When these words reached her ears, Jennie could only blink twice. Deeply absorbed in his golden eyes, she completely forgot the dazzling dilemma she was facing!

Orienting herself, she spoke confidently, disguising her nervousness. "What happened earlier... was quite unpleasant. Maybe now, you feel a little better?"

Liam bowed his head and nodded. A small laugh escaped his lips as he lightly caressed Jennie's cheeks with his two fingers. Under the warmth of his touch, her body relaxed.

The time had come for her to explain to Liam why she had come to this place.

For a long time, Jennie had been trying to eradicate the slave traders. However, despite many attempts at repression, raids and arrests, the traders did not relent. She could not see an end to this illicit business. Even if she caught one trader and freed the slaves, another would always appear. She was far outnumbered.

This was a problem that would never be solved unless she attacked the core of the matter.

Jennie concluded that the demand for slaves would never go away. Estia's royal family had no power to sanction noblemen or rich merchants who had an interest in slavery. The only solution was to cut off the supply.

However, this was easier said than done. In the end, she had to confront the slave traders directly. The slave traders were scattered everywhere, looking for more individuals with good abilities.

It was impossible to defeat this system using a simple method.

"So, you came straight here acting like a slave trader?" His tone sounded uncertain, the light in his eyes had faded.

"Because there is limited information for the guests, I had to come as a trader..."

For many years, she ran a fake slave trade. After making a name for herself among the slave traders, she was recognized as a slave trader who had a high position in the government supported by VIP aristocrats.

Over the years, Jennie had come to the point of uniting the slave traders to open a large auction. In addition, she also provided them with information about the severe measures to slowly gain their trust.

However, since this grand auction was done through a coalition of several slave traders, all of them, including Jennie, were organizers of this grand auction.

"Even if I won their trust, they don't completely believe me. They are suspicious people, so they keep keeping an eye on each other." She told Liam

For this reason, although some were organizers of this auction, they still had to pass strict entry procedures. Security did not allow just anyone to pass through easily.

"Did you also trade Kurkans?" he asked.

"Only the old and sick Kurkans. I don't have enough funds to buy young, healthy Kurkans. I didn't buy many, but they are all safe, so you don't have to worry." Jennie stated confidently. She knew clearly the purpose of Liam in this auction house.

Liam did not ask Jennie to give him the Kurkans she had rescued. He simply flashed a subtle smile and asked her.

"So those are the kinds of trades you make?"

Jennie slowly nodded. Since this operation alone seemed insufficient, she had recently bought many Kurkans slaves and planned to hide them during the auction. Liam laughed vaguely.

"Really... there is a reason why Estia's royal family is not yet ruined." Liam's eyebrows furrowed. "You know what? A slave trader was always one step ahead of us. I thought she was a very capable person, so I looked her up. Then I found out it was you."

His sincerity was reflected in the absurd words that came out of his mouth. In fact, Jennie had predicted that Liam would rescue the Kurkans, so she moved even faster. She had to interfere, to get the upper hand.

However, she did not tell him this, as there was no need to mention it when the negotiations had not yet begun. She had to hide as many details as possible.

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## Chapter 48

### Chapter 48 — Full Moon Night

Jennie got rid of those thoughts and said, "I didn't expect to find you here."

Although she hoped Liam would participate in this auction, she didn't expect that they would meet each other. She had originally planned to leave before the auction began, maintaining her incognito profile.

The best course of action she had thought of was to also infiltrate as a guest. Unexpectedly, she had ended up revealing herself as a slave trader.

"How did you get in?" she asked.

Jennie found it hard to believe that he had infringed on the strict security. Liam had even made it as far as the reception room.

Liam laughed at her surprise. "Well, are you supposed to be more surprised than me?" He hinted playfully.

Afterwards, silence dominated the room. Jennie realized too late that she had been sitting on Liam's lap for too long. Unconsciously, this had not seemed strange to her. In fact, she was used to her skin touching his. The fact that she felt comfortable being with Liam in such an intimate position, surprised her.

As her instincts indicated, she began to break free from her control. However, Liam's thick arms, which had wrapped around her waist, showed no intention of letting go. Trapped in her steel grip, she raised her head and slowly found his eyes.

"What I asked the other day," Liam expressed with modesty.

Jennie was stunned as soon as she heard his voice low and tenuous. Liam grabbed her chin and lifted it as she avoided his gaze so their eyes would meet.

"Have you thought about it? You've escaped without giving me the

answer."

His hoarse voice tickled her ear. This seemed strange to her. The feelings he aroused in her, even though she had prepared her answer beforehand, made her stop for a moment. She wanted to tell him to forget their conversation, that she had mentioned that subject casually for him to leave her alone. However, those words refused to come out of her mouth.

In the past, she would have said so without hesitation. But now, the words were stuck in her throat. No matter what, she couldn't let go of those words even if she wanted to.

His thumb slowly touched her lip sliding down, while her mouth closed tightly. Liam whispered as he brushed his nose against hers.

"You don't need to live responsibly, Jennie."

"....."

The warmth of his breath, and his nose caressing her made her feel an indescribable emotion. Why was he being so sweet?

"You seem to be the only one who wants to continue with the negotiation. Why are you so tied to the royal family?"

She could become a fugitive. Throw everything overboard and live freely.

His twisted words sounded so sweet that not even a honey-coated palm date could compare. Their implicit meaning attracted her.

Jennie looked at him enraptured. The weight of responsibility on her shoulders was almost unbearable, and the freedom she had chosen – the death – would be the fate she would have as a princess. Liam told her to get rid of all the burdens that were on her mind.

If Liam, as he promised, were to take responsibility for her, could she give up everything? The man in front of her, since he came into her life, had turned her upside down.

Jennie raised her voice helplessly.

"...Why would you do this for me?"

"...For now, let's say... That we are compatible in bed."

Hearing his cheeky words, she gave him a piercing look. Liam burst out laughing at her gaze. His laughter gradually faded, allowing the atmosphere to return to the comfortable silence.

His golden eyes looked firmly into Jennie's violet eyes. He lowered his gaze, traveling through her small nose, to the soft curve of her lips. His thumb, which had previously been touching her lips, slowly crept into her mouth.

To his amazement, the soft, velvety tongue licked his finger. Jennie's eyelashes trembled, her instincts betrayed her.

The light in Liam's eyes shone even brighter. Strange. She couldn't find the right words to describe them clearly, but his golden eyes, today, she found them particularly special.

It was as if he had bewitched her, drawing her to himself.

The king slowly brought his face closer to hers. His thumb slid slowly along her teeth. Liam narrowed his eyes as he smiled and whispered seductively.

"Did you know that today is a full moon?"

**SLAM!**

The next second, the door opened wide, interrupting the couple who were immersed in their own bubble.

Upon hearing this, Jennie was surprised and quickly distanced herself from Liam.

It was Genin who appeared, grabbing the neck of Count Valtein who was standing next to her. Genin's mouth opened slightly. Her words were caught in her throat as she pointed to Jennie, stunned.

Count Valtein, who had entered the room with Genin, was very surprised when he saw Liam and Jennie together.



A somewhat tense and peculiar atmosphere was created.

As Count Valtein cursed in his mind, someone appeared behind Genin's head.

"Ahh!"

The person who exclaimed, was also surprised when he saw Jennie. It was the handsome Kurkan who had taken Jennie to the royal palace the other day. He opened his mouth and mumbled.

"What is this...? Why is the princess here...?"

Liam clicked his tongue, dissatisfaction reflecting on his face.

The man named Haban entered urgently, so Liam approached Jennie. Liam acted as if the others were a plague that could not set their eyes on Jennie.

"You said you had self-control!" Haban exclaimed, exalted.

"Yes. It didn't work well." Liam responded calmly, getting Jennie down from his lap. Then, he grabbed the back of her neck, and pulled her head to his chest. His other hand went down to her waist, and his thumb made small circles on it. "I think I lied, Haban."

Haban stared at Jennie's red face and asked, "What did Liam say to you?"

"He said nothing, except that today was the full moon..."

Jennie replied, perplexed. Liam became angry and yelled at Haban.

"You've been talking a lot of nonsense!"

Genin released Count Valtein's neck and slowly approached her. Then, she carefully stole Jennie from Liam, putting Jennie behind her and making sure her big body was hiding her.

Having no idea of their dispute, Jennie asked what was going on. Genin turned around and stared at her. Her voice sounded tense as she answered.

"When Kurkans mention the full moon, it usually has a sexual meaning."

"Huh?" Jennie opened her mouth in surprise.

"The day the full moon rises..."

Genin looked at Count Valtein as she whispered quietly, making sure only Jennie heard her.

"It's mating season."

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## Chapter 49

### Chapter 49 — Leah's Plans

Jennie couldn't help the surprise she felt, but did her best to hide it. Of course, she knew about the beasts' mating season, but she had only read about it in books.

Jennie staggered as she tried to resolve her racing thoughts, while Genin continued her explanation calmly. "It's logical that a Kurkan would mate and seek to fulfill his reproductive instinct," she said.

Haban intervened, and assured her that she should not worry. It was completely ordinary for their species to act more impulsively when in front of their partner.

Hearing her mention this, Jennie had a sudden thought. She immediately turned to Genin, who always seemed to be accompanying Liam.

"Perhaps..." Jennie started, but Genin immediately interrupted, as she had anticipated what she was going to say next.

"We're not a couple," she said defensively. "People often confuse us because we are always together, but I assure you, my husband is much better looking."

Genin went on to explain that while Liam was acting frivolous, her husband was not. He was considerate and careful. She bragged about her husband, instilling in Jennie a very generous impression of this unknown man. Genin seemed very used to praising her partner.

When she finished her praise, Genin returned to the main theme as if nothing had happened. Liam and Haban only shrugged their shoulders slightly.

"The Kurkans are a little different during the full moon. Your body won't be able to handle it." Genin chose not to elaborate, knowing that if she did, Jennie would not have been able to deal with the force of the resulting shock. "You must get as far away from Liam as

possible," she said. "Especially today."

Then, Genin's hands, big and strong, extended gently towards the princess. She took the laces from Jennie's robe and carefully pulled them, manipulating them to better hide the princess' light skin. She handled Jennie with care, as if she was as delicate as a porcelain doll. Perhaps, she hesitated to touch her after having witnessed her fainting previously. Haban had the same attitude.

"Your Highness," he began, "My name is Haban. I apologize for not having introduced myself formally, especially since I had seen you the other day."

Along with the courtesy of his introduction, Haban softened his voice. He seemed cautious, as if speaking louder could damage Jennie's ears.

Although he felt ridiculous, he did not want to question her fragility.

"Oh," Genin exhaled, noticing the shaking figure of the count. "I'm sorry I overwhelmed you," she muttered. Valtein's face was pale.

Count Valtein wanted to say that he would've died if Genin had kept him any longer. Instead, he said nothing and desisted from saying his complaints.

Breaking the tension, Liam stood up from his seat, arms crossed. The mastery of his posture spoke of his confidence. "The slave trader we were following was the princess," he said.

Genin and Haban looked at Jennie, their eyes widening in wonder. They found it hard to believe that this delicate princess was the source of all their problems, that she was always one step ahead of them.

Liam laughed with a good mood. "I think I've taken a heavy hit."

While everyone else was entertained by this information, Count Valtein remained cautious. He grabbed Jennie's hem, his eyes conveying a fervent fear. He knew of the alleged brutality of the Kurkans, and he trembled. He feared his neck would be wrung at the slightest provocation.

To comfort him, Jennie gave him a gentle pat on the hand. However, this only made Valtein shrink further, as Liam, who had just finished speaking, stared at him.

Before poor Count Valtein passed out, Jennie opened her mouth to speak. "So, what do you plan to do?"

Liam kept his gaze. It was a miracle that somehow everyone was meeting at the same time and place. She knew that there were other Kurkans hiding nearby as well.

However, Jennie could not decipher what was going on in Liam's head. He was an inscrutable man, but at least she knew that whatever strategy he had in mind would probably not lead to a peaceful solution. If Liam proceeded as he wished, he could ruin Jennie's meticulous plan. He needed to eliminate the root of the problem. She needed a means of controlling potential adversaries she didn't anticipate finding.

"If our goals are the same, it would be better to join forces," Jennie offered.

"Well... You are right..." Liam smiled slowly. "What are you thinking, princess?" He agreed to discuss her plan in more detail.

Jennie explained briefly, aiming to persuade him in the least disastrous direction. "So, if we find where the Kurkans are trapped..."

"You're a little scary, princess," said Count Valtein, shyly lifting the corner of his mouth, forcing himself not to laugh at his own joke. He knew that if he laughed, they would be thrown out of the room.

"We must go after them. Together." suggested Liam, in an authoritative voice.

"But..." Jennie quickly protested. The idea was absurd.

"We can follow them quietly," added Liam comfortably. "You must allow this."

He was a man who knew how to put pressure on others. Jennie hadn't foreseen this, but she couldn't find an excuse to object.

Perhaps, including the Kurkans and revising her current plan would be for the best.

Jennie pondered for a moment before saying, "If I do, will you follow my plans?" she asked quietly.

A small smile appeared on Liam's lips. "Only you can relegate the king of the Kurkan to such submission."

"I don't need anyone to stand in my way," said Jennie, knowing full well how mischievous and cunning the king was before her.

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## Chapter 50

### Chapter 50 — Entertainment

Liam seemed satisfied with her plan, which relieved Jennie, since the person who could cause the most disruption was now willing to cooperate. She was about to continue talking when suddenly, they heard someone knocking on the door.

It turned out to be a legitimate employee of the auction. In an instant, the Kurkans disappeared and the room was devoid of their presence, as if they had never been present. They carefully hid every trace of their presence and went into hiding.

Jennie and Count Valtein also quickly put on their masks.

As soon as they allowed the employee to enter, the door opened and an escort entered. "Everyone is waiting," he announced.

Before the auction, the slave traders were expected to meet to conduct a short meeting. It represented the most difficult obstacle in their path, but the most important part of her plan.

"Let's go now. Guide the way." Jennie's voice surprised the employee, who quickly looked down.

"Okay, I'll guide you then, lady."

Jennie and Count Valtein followed the escort. Count Valtein silently wiped the sweat-soaked palm of his hand on the hem of his robe. Seeing how nervous he was, Jennie felt sorry for not explaining to him the situation properly beforehand and just dragged him into this.

Jennie looked forward indifferently, contemplating the dark surroundings. Liam was probably following them in silence, but she couldn't feel his presence at all.

At the meeting with the slave traders, Jennie had planned to take the lead. She could not trust Count Valtein, since he was a fearful person and would have difficulty doing so. After all that had happened, it would be useless to provide misinformation to these cunning slave

traders. So after careful consideration, Jennie decided to participate actively.

However, her plans were abruptly interrupted when she was disturbed by the unexpected appearance of the Kurkans. She didn't know the extent of Liam's rudeness, but she knew that he was very capable of doing certain things...

As she walked, her mind was full of complicated thoughts, and she expected Liam to be patient.

After passing through a maze of corridors, they finally arrived at the meeting of the slave traders. The room was quite dark. There was a round table in the center, and the escorts of the slave traders were side by side. Count Valtein hesitated as he moved to stand next to the escorts.

There were a total of eight people, including Jennie.

Among the slave traders, there were not only citizens of Estia, since some came from different corners of the continent. They were covered with masks and tunics, hiding their entire bodies. Jennie watched them, and they watched her in turn.

From the moment of Jennie's arrival, they looked at her openly. Even though she was covered from head to toe like the others, with her own robe and mask, she could not hide her thin little physique. The fragile skin that peeked through her attire was obviously not that of a man.

The round table did not have any elevated seat, but in spite of the supposed equality, the implicit ranking between them would not disappear. Sitting opposite Jennie was a sturdy figure. He was the most powerful slave trader among those present.

The slave traders continued to watch her intently even after she sat down, their eyes glowing maliciously. Aware of their lewd looks, Jennie held on and slowly opened her mouth.

"This is the first time that I am before you all."

A gale of laughter erupted. The man with the robust physique spoke



in a hoarse voice. "I didn't know you were a woman," he said.

The other slave traders spoke, one by one.

"Your voice is beautiful. Will your face be the same?"

"Her body is so small."

"Women with small physiques are very popular these days. Because of the princess, they sell quite well."

His words were discourteous. Jennie had prepared herself for their bad behavior, however, her heart began to sink into worry. Her nervousness came from the knowledge that Liam was hiding nearby, watching them.

Jennie tapped the table with her finger. The slave traders were instantly silent.

"Is gender so important when it comes to buying and selling?" she asked, in a tone of voice that was strong and cold. "Shouldn't profit be the most important thing?"

Although she couldn't look at their faces and witness their reactions, she knew that all their attention was focused on her. Jennie bowed her head.

"If I'm the only one present with that mentality, then I guess I shouldn't have come."

As soon as Jennie finished, the man on the other side of her laughed out loud again.

"It's a rare thing for a woman to be a slave trader. Everyone is amazed. I hope you understand," he said, one hand on his chin. "Also, it is very surprising to discover that the one who has brought us all together is a little lady like you."

The mockery was clear in his voice. A wide smile spread across his face.

Jennie looked at him coldly. "I will accept that as an apology."

"Haha, yes... Anyway, let's cooperate properly. We'll see each other often in the future."

It wasn't a bad start, but it meant that from now on, Jennie couldn't retire. Her conversations became serious, and her plan had begun to unfold. Jennie remained firm in her intentions.

However, an event that happened soon shook her heart.

"Since this seems like fate, I'd like to offer everyone a little entertainment..."

Then, the man shouted loudly for some people to come in. The back door opened, and a line of sweet-smelling women quickly entered the room. They held trays loaded with alcohol and sat down, one by one, next to the slave traders.

"You don't have to feel so stiff," the man laughed. His arms were wrapped around the waist of the woman sitting next to him. Jennie had become tense, surprised by his sudden and unpleasant display of generosity.

"Oh, and don't worry, I'll attend to you too," he assured her, chuckling at her embarrassment. "Give this lady a barbarous man!"

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# Chapter 51

## Chapter 51 — Slaves

The slave traders had their own displays of hospitality. Conveying kindness and showing good will was a crucial task for them, because it helped them gain the trust of their cautious companions.

Count Valtein, who witnessed the scene, was unfazed. He stood there stiffly, preoccupied with the idea that Liam was watching them in the shadows.

However, he knew that Jennie could not refuse the favor of the slave traders. And to make matters worse, she couldn't afford to act rashly, because she was being watched by those around her.

They scrutinized her every move. Any uncalculated act could instantly dissolve the little trust she had managed to generate, a mistake Jennie could not afford.

As time passed, a male slave came to attend to Jennie. Like the female slaves, he was colorfully dressed, and held a wine in his hand. However, his slender body caught her attention, because he had a body type comparable to that of Haban.

The most obvious difference between them was in their muscles; Haban's build can be considered thin, but she looked toned and strong. However, the male slave seemed to have only skin and bone.

He possessed the quintessence of the Kurkan's light eyes and dark skin, but did not have a single muscle. Had it not been for the tattoos on the back of his neck, Jennie would not have realized that he was a Kurkan.

**(PS. Quintessence: purest quality of a thing.)**

Walking softly, the slave approached Jennie, sitting next to her. He emanated a sweet smell of peach. The fruity perfume tickled her nose, and she became rigid.

The slave trader, who was still caressing the Kurkan female slave next

to him, looked at Jennie. "Don't you like it?" he said. "He's a precious slave, which I'm giving to you. Or perhaps, you prefer a more athletic one?"

He prepared to call another slave, ready to replace the weak Kurkan who was at her side. However, aware of the delicate situation, she could not allow any more outsiders to enter, so Jennie immediately stopped him.

"No, it's all right. I didn't expect this to happen during our meeting," she replied, her voice choking.

"You don't have to be so formal. Just make yourself comfortable and relax. Enjoy yourself!" exclaimed the slave trader. He squeezed the Kurkan slave harder, pulling her towards him, causing her to give a little shout.

Jennie frowned. She felt as if she were sitting on a chair of thorns. The slave poured her a glass of sweet fruit wine.

"Please have a drink, lady."

However, Jennie did not accept the drink he offered her, and the slave trader, upon realizing this, frowned in dismay with his eyes narrowed. Then he asked, "Don't you like the wine?"

At her question, Jennie raised her glass just to wet her lips. The powerful taste of the wine filtered through her tongue, and she looked at the man, who was now smiling happily. A strange sensation invaded her, and she could not find the right words to express it.

It was a difficult feat to enslave the Kurkans as they were natural-born warriors. However, the more difficult the task and the more the result was coveted, the greater its value. If the Kurkans were particularly beautiful too, then that value would only increase, becoming practically incalculable.

As a result, the slave traders essentially dedicated themselves to enslaving these exceptional goods, with the intention of satisfying their greedy clients.

But that raised the question: How was all this possible when the

Kurkans were such proud warriors? Surely, the slave traders could be easily defeated.

The answer, then, lay in the vulnerable youth of the Kurkans.

Mature Kurkans were strong and experienced fighters. It was almost impossible to capture them, and were even harder to tame. In the event that they were captured, the probability of their escape was very high. Therefore, traders sought out those who were still young and naive, as they were fundamentally incapable of fighting their kidnappers.

It was a repugnant cycle. A young and uncultured Kurkan was no different from a young beast. They were weak, lacked training, and could easily be trained as slaves over time through strict education.

However, their education would be far from normal. They would be severely beaten and abused until their identities as Kurkan evaporated, forgetting what they once were. They were taught submission and obedience through ruthless violence, until they became meek slaves unable to oppose their masters even after reaching adulthood.

Because of this demanding process, Kurkan slaves were traded at tremendously high prices. However, although the traders wanted to adopt this practice frequently as it benefited them large sums, they couldn't. They quickly ran out of these slaves, since Kurkan slaves were an extraordinary rarity.

A base of consumers were desperate to obtain them, which made the slave traders and mercenaries anxious. Their eyes were bloodshot, poisoned by greed and desire.

Later, a slave trade route was established, with Estia as a base. Estia represented a privileged place for this, since it bordered the western desert, which was the home of the Kurkans.

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## Chapter 52

### Chapter 52 — Valuable Kurkan

At that time, Jennie became interested in the slave trade because of the growing activity. A battle had taken place, in which rival slave traders were seeking to strategically position themselves in Estia, the most convenient location for kidnappings. In trying to suppress the corresponding disturbances, Jennie had become familiar with the enslavement of the Kurkans, and it caused her profound pain.

She resented the cruel reality and the fate of the Kurkan slaves, and held hatred for herself who couldn't do anything about it, even though she was the princess of Estia.

The more she thought about it, the angrier Jennie became. The lives of the Kurkans were equal to her own. She could even partially identify with them in some way. Jennie had been forced to endure the excessive efforts of Cerdina who tried to ruin her entire life. She could not oppose Cerdina, and lived oppressed by her, tied to the kingdom from birth. Her royal blood represented her death, almost like that of the Kurkans, whose blood and race dictated their courage.

*「 You must be the perfect princess, Jennie. 」*

As Jennie recalled certain moments from the past, it seemed as if she heard Cerdina's voice. Jennie bit her lips to keep from thinking about it. She wasn't in a situation where she could be remembering depressing things. She had a task to accomplish and people to save.

One last duty to perform for her country. The weight of Estia's future weighed heavily on her shoulders.

The male Kurkan next to Jennie leaned forward and whispered as she carefully lowered her wine glass.

"I am curious to know what face is behind this mask... How beautiful are you?"

A thin finger grazed Jennie's shoulders. Instantly, she shuddered and

pulled him away, casually touching the slave's hand. She took a deep breath.

The slave simply smiled. Perhaps he deliberately made her drink too much, with the intention of getting her drunk. After looking at him as he clung tightly to her, Jennie whispered, "Listen to me carefully."

"Yes?"

"I have no intention of doing anything with you, so behave with restraint," she said. Then she added quietly, "I'm here to save you."

The Kurkan's gaze began to waver, but he skillfully contained his emotions. "Your joke is too much to bear," he replied.

"You will soon discover whether I am joking or not. Can you run? If you cannot, tell me now."

Jennie asked him in advance because she knew that there were cases where slaves had certain muscles cut to make it difficult for them to escape. This prevented them from escaping if they wanted to or had previously tried.

The male Kurkan smiled delicately and bloomed, but the light in his eyes shone.

"Of course." Jennie could detect a faint murderous intent under his gentle voice. The prospect of wreaking havoc thrilled him. "I can do more than that," he whispered in her ear.

Although it seemed that Jennie's situation and the Kurkans were similar, there was a key difference between them. The Kurkans could be enslaved all their lives, but they would not hesitate to take the opportunity to escape, even if it meant enduring beatings and abuse.

This male Kurkan slave for example, had overcome the brainwashing that had been done to him all his life. Inside him, the blood of the Kurkans flowed unrestrained. Which, through experience, made them formidable warriors and unstoppable opponents.

No matter how young, sick or frail a Kurkan was, their true nature was on their side. It did not matter if they were slaves, warriors,

children, or elders. If they are born as Kurkan, they die as Kurkan.

They were different from Jennie, who only doubted again and again...

Behind her mask, Jennie bit her lip hard again. The flood of emotions that came from witnessing the hope and courage of the male slave caught her off guard. In a moment, she felt the differences between them were as great as the earth and the sky.

However, she quickly pushed aside these feelings and then raised her voice for all to hear.

"I would like to discuss benefit sharing."

Upon hearing the word 'benefits', the slave traders immediately focused on it. Greed was in their eyes.

They gave Jennie their full attention.

"Benefit sharing?" asked a slave trader, raising his glass of wine and taking a sip. It was the man with the robust body, the one who seemed to have the highest position among them. Jennie knew of this man's great influence. "Each of us will take our respective share," he said. "Then we'll split the remaining 30% between us."

"That's right. And, since we will share the 30%, I want to inspect the Kurkans you are offering. I need to be thorough. After all, we wouldn't be the only ones to suffer if we sell poor quality products."

Jennie bowed her head and continued, convincingly.

"Of course, it's to avoid losses."

"Haha, I like this." He laughed at Jennie's words. Even then, as he lowered his wine glass, his eyes never left her. The female Kurkan slave by his side moved immediately to fill the glass.

The slave trader brought the cup to his lips, sipping as he looked at Jennie. He could not deduce anything simply by looking at the mask that hid her face and the black robe she donned, thus he could only look at the bare skin of her hand.



"Your confidence is quite overwhelming," he then asked. "Do you think your own slaves are that good?"

"They are good enough to change the course of this auction."

It wasn't a lie because the King of Kurkans was present, but the slave trader laughed at Jennie's seemingly ridiculous statement and responded, "I'll show you anything you want, but since what I have is pretty confidential, I can't show it to many others." He pushed aside the female Kurkan slave who was sitting next to him. "It will be fine if it's just the two of us. Then you can check."

"That doesn't sound bad," Jennie nonchalantly responded while nodding her head.

The slave trader immediately stood up and gestured to Jennie.

"Follow me."

He opened a door, and Jennie followed him closely. She knew she wasn't alone, so she tried to be as quick as possible.

The hallway to the back door was very different from the one Jennie had initially used to enter the meeting room. It had bright lights, and there was a thick carpet covering the floor. It was a corridor that connected the meeting room with the auction house.

The slave trader stopped in front of a large iron door and took out a key.

**Clack!**

After unlocking the lock, he opened the door abruptly. The trader exaggeratedly extended his arms, pretending to act as a gentleman escorting her.

When Jennie entered, the door closed behind her. The atmosphere inside repulsed her more than she expected. The disgust she felt inside could not be explained.

A little Kurkan girl was curled up on a huge bed covered with soft quilts. Her extremities were small and thin. It was clear that she had

not yet reached puberty. She had large, heavy bones pressing on her premature bones.

As soon as the slave trader entered the room, the Kurkan girl stood up, her empty expression transformed into an expression of fear. She shuddered, fleeing to the corner of the room.

The slave trader put his arm around Jennie's shoulders. "As you know, young Kurkan girls are the most expensive. So, what do you think of this? Are you satisfied?" he asked with satisfaction. It was clear how proud he was of his piece.

He brought his body closer to Jennie, close enough that she could feel his rough breath.

"Only the two of us are here. Before you go, why don't you take all this off? From the moment you started talking, I couldn't help but wonder what kind of face I might find behind such a beautiful voice...!"

There was no need to keep listening to the avalanche of dirt coming out of the slave trader's filthy mouth. Jennie knew that her protector must have followed her.

She said his name.

"Liam."

The slave trader suddenly began to tremble, exhaling deeply. The next instant, a loud thud echoed throughout the room. The heavy body of the trader collapsed on the floor. A jet of hot liquid came out of his body, staining the carpet a deep dark red.

A solid arm surrounded Jennie's waist from behind. Liam passed his face to the side of her neck.

"You're trying my patience, right?" he whispered. Beneath his relaxed tone, there was a latent rage, slowly rising. "I almost killed them all, Jennie."

\*\*\*

The auction house of the eight slave traders was soon filled with potential buyers. They piled up like clouds gathering in a gigantic storm.

Estia's position in the center of the continent gave it its status as the epicenter of the slave trade.

However, the kingdom had announced its intentions to take drastic measures against this practice, which prompted today's attendees to come with their pockets full, aware that this event could be considered as the last slave auction in these territories.

In response to the expectations of the guests, the slave traders brought their best products for exhibit, and had proudly prepared for this special occasion.

Many rumors had spread throughout the royal capital. People spoke of the high quality products that would be featured, and coveted slaves that would be on the exhibit.

Because of this, the auction was filled to capacity with visitors, hiding in the basement of a large mansion. Despite the remote location, which was on the outskirts of the city's capital, there was no empty seat anywhere.

The eager guests enjoyed the alcohol and food that had been served to them as they quietly waited for the auction to begin. Even as they talked among themselves, discussing the barbarian slaves to be sold, they could not help but turn their gaze to the thick curtain that covered the stage. Impatient for the great revelation, they were all attentive, curious to know when the curtain would finally rise.

The audience was excited. However, the time designated for the start of the auction had already passed, and the curtains had not yet moved an inch. Normally, if there was a delay in the procedure, there would be an announcement to calm the guests' concerns.

However, no announcement was made.

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## Chapter 53

### Chapter 53 — Blood

While waiting for the auction to begin, the guests got tired. Their faces became bitter, full of restlessness. Even the diligent servants who were attending to the guests had disappeared. The irritation could be felt in the atmosphere until finally, a customer began to shout out loud.

"What happened? Did something bad happen?"

The guests became more and more anxious with every minute that passed. When the auction house began to rumble, the curtain finally rose.

The curtains were supposed to go up without a problem, but they were lifted slightly differently. It was lifted crookedly, as if lifted by one person using only one arm.

When the scene was revealed, it was completely dark. A strange man came out of the darkness.

He was wearing a loose outfit that looked as if he had stolen it from somewhere. He approached the center of the scene and shouted emphatically.

"Genin!"

Suddenly, the lights came on. The complete figure of the man, now visible, stunned the guests. Their jaws dropped and their eyes grew larger.

On the scene was a barbarian. A Kurkan.

"Thank you for coming to the auction today!," he exclaimed, his voice sounding happily in the air. His dimples accentuated his wide and endearing smile.

Customers, even without understanding the situation, wondered if it was all part of a presentation. It could be an introduction organized

for the final slave auction of the kingdom.

However, the more insightful guests realized what was happening, and immediately began to look for a way out.

The man on stage continued to speak, capturing the attention of the crowd.

"As everyone has foreseen, today we celebrate a very special event! That's right..." The man extended both arms and shouted: "Now you are all slaves, being chased by slave traders!"

The auction house was immediately silent, as if ice water had been thrown over the entire audience. The man laughed happily as he stood in front of the paralyzed guests. His dimples, which decorated his face like two elegant holes, seemed to burst out as he showcased a wicked smile.

"What do you think? Sounds like fun, doesn't it?"

The stillness was broken. The guests screamed frantically, passing over other people, chairs or tables. They stumbled on the way to the exits, making the whole place a total chaos. The man laughed as he watched people run towards the doors, abandoning their dignity. The man's eyelids narrowed, his eyes shone with ecstasy.

"Ladies and Gentlemen! From now on..."

The wild beasts suddenly appeared from all directions. The man jumped from the stage and joined the crowd.

"I hope you are all good at running!" he shouted.

\*\*\*

As soon as Jennie released the girl from her chains, the little Kurkan girl ran to the trader who had owned her. She jumped up, trampling him savagely, as if he would die a second time.

Liam grabbed the girl who was jumping on the man and pushed her aside. Then he searched the body and took out a bunch of keys from it. They were in his hand, the first symbol of freedom of the Kurkan

slaves.

"Haban, Genin."

At his call, the two appeared, then he threw the keys at them.

"Everyone will gather here," he said.

Haban and Genin, taking the keys, began their search. They finished soon after, returning with all the Kurkan captives. They were decently dressed because they had been captured just before they headed for the auction. While Haban was guiding them, Genin reported to Liam.

"Contrary to the number we expected, I think there is one missing. Maybe it's somewhere else," she said.

"He has a very hostile attitude, so I think he was trapped in a separate room," the girl shouted. She was squatting in the corner, but suddenly intervened. She walked with determination when she met Liam's gaze. "I can lead you to where he is."

Liam turned to Haban and Genin. "How much time do we have before the auction starts?"

"We are a little short of time," Haban responded.

Liam thought about Haban's answer for a moment before deciding. "I will go with the princess. As for all of you..." he stopped, the corners of his mouth raised. "Please greet the guests of the auction."

Haban's and Genin's eyes shone. It's been a while since they had any good action, and all this was on a completely different level. Excited to lead the other Kurkans, they disappeared.

Jennie hoped that Count Valtein would not be too horrified by the impending bloodbath. She and Liam left, following the girl.

Jennie's original plan was to secretly rescue the captured slaves. Free them all, including the Kurkans, and then escape before the auction began.

However, her plan deviated the moment Liam became involved. Suddenly, she had to accept all the changes, which his presence had caused.

She predicted a bloodbath...

Following the girl Kurkan, Liam and Jennie entered the basement, avoiding the detection of the mansion's employees.

"How many people are you going to kill?" Jennie asked, whispering to Liam.

"All the slave traders. As for the customers... Well, the lucky ones will survive, I guess."

Liam, who was walking silently while carrying Jennie, stopped for a moment and suddenly looked back. A distant cry echoed from the auction house.

"We must move quickly," he said.

The last Kurkan slave seemed to be locked up somewhere in the deepest part of the labyrinthine mansion. Their route began to change slowly as they advanced, from well-finished walls to wet stone walls. The rotten wooden stairs creaked with every step.

There was not enough illumination, so they could not see in front of them, but Liam skillfully guided the way.

"I can't believe he was locked up in a place like this," whispered Jennie in Liam's embrace.

It looked like a subway prison. Like a horse corral, only with more space. He thought they could have at least had the decency to keep it in a cleaner place if they were going to sell it.

"I don't think they would have given him the slightest sip of water until he passed out," Liam said simply, unhurriedly. "Only when a Kurkan can't take any more and is on the verge of starvation, will they offer him a piece of bread. The act of being fed is a means of cultivating obedience."

**(PS. Starvation: suffering or death caused by hunger.)**

He spoke naturally, and the lightness of his tone only served to further emphasize the inhuman nature of the slaves' treatment.

"The reason I came this far today is because I believe there are customers who wanted fierce slaves," he ended his speech with those words.

"You... talk as if you've been there yourself."

Liam laughed briefly. Instead of responding, he just kept going. Unlike the road they had traveled so far, they were in a noticeably brighter area. It had a small window at the top of the dark roof.

With the moonlight filtering through and the torches hanging down, their surroundings slowly lit up as they went further in. In the middle of the round space was an iron cell.

Inside it was a small Kurkan boy. He was strongly chained, and had a large steel ball tied to him. He seemed to be unconscious, but as soon as he felt other presences in the room, he moved. He stood up, with a threatening and fierce posture. Although his eyes looked tired, Jennie could still feel the hatred emanating from his gaze. The boy looked no different than a wild beast.

"....."

Liam took Jennie down from his arms and looked at the boy silently for a moment. The moonlight that shone on Liam's face made his eyes seem colder than usual.

His closed lips moved slowly. "You..." Liam's golden eyes captivated Jennie. Liam radiated a peculiar energy, and she felt that she could stay looking at his golden irises forever. Since he took off his mask, his eyes had become clearer. She felt as if she could perceive all the emotions inside him.

"Do you remember all the Kurkans you saved?" he asked quietly.

It was a strange question. Liam looked at Jennie as if he wanted her to give him the answer he wanted.



However, she didn't know what Liam wanted, so she could only be honest.

Some memories were too old. There were also too many urgent situations, in which she could not look properly at the faces of the Kurkans she was releasing. To claim that she remembered them all would be a deception. As she slowly shook her head, the bitterness reflected weakly in Liam's eyes.

"I understand."

Liam said nothing more. Then, he took the key and stood in front of the cell, opening three or more locks consecutively. As the iron keys rang out, Jennie wondered.

'Should I have nodded my head even though I was lying?'

His bitter smile disturbed her. She approached him with doubts. Liam threw the last lock on the floor and looked at Jennie. The moment she opened her lips to speak to him, the iron door burst open.

The boy ran quickly to Jennie and jumped on her stomach. She fell, shocked by the sudden attack. The boy looked at her fiercely, madness was evident on his face. As the boy moved to tear Jennie's neck, Liam intervened with his forearm, blocking the boy's bite.

The blood flowed from Liam when the sound of the bite resounded grotesquely at the site. Liam threw the boy away. He flew like a rubber ball, crashing into the wall and then sliding motionless to the ground. The rattling of his chains disappeared.

A trembling voice spoke aloud.

"Liam...."

Blood dripped from his forearm and spilled on the floor. Jennie looked at his wound, only to find teeth marks around it. Her heart collapsed.

"We have to stop the bleeding," she urged. "I can stop the bleeding with my clothes..."

"No, Jennie."

Liam stepped back a few feet, keeping Jennie from touching him. He frowned, was worried and frustrated. "You should stay away from me. You know, there's a full moon tonight."

As he spoke, the moonlight shone on them. In the creepy, cold light, they both looked at each other.

Jennie thoughtlessly lifted a hand to her mouth.

"That would be difficult...especially when I see blood."

The front of Liam's pants began to swell.

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## Chapter 54

### Chapter 54 — Plead

Listening to Liam, Jennie remembered the stories Genin had told her. It had been going around in her head since the moment Genin had first explained the true nature of a Kurkan during the full moon. Only one word came to her mind now, echoing through confused memories.

Mating...

Seeing Jennie speechless made Liam laugh. Her eyes were wide open, and her lips could barely stammer a full sentence.

"But the wound..."

"It will heal even if I do nothing," he shrugged.

Liam approached the boy he had thrown, who laid motionless on the ground. He checked for a pulse and confirmed that the boy was still breathing. "He's not dead," he muttered.

However, he confirmed that the child would most likely remain unconscious until the next day. Since the boy had been abused for so long, it was only natural that he would exhaust all his strength after jumping to Jennie.

Liam picked up the boy and laid him down in a corner before sighing. He had been forcing himself not to make eye contact with Jennie. Concerned, he slowly backed up and leaned against the iron bars of the window.

"Haa..."

He sighed and raised his hand to touch his hair. As his fingers brushed against his dark brown strands, blood flowed down his arm. The wound was exposed, and dark red threads of blood dripped down his elbow, forming a puddle on the floor.

Jennie approached Lisa slowly, who felt surprised by her own

actions. Throughout their many interactions, Liam had always been the first to approach. Her mind remembered the moment when he had gone to get her for a luncheon. His charming evil smile and his magnetic golden eyes were embedded in her mind.

Leaning on the iron bars, Liam stared at Jennie, wanting her to stop. He tried to restrain himself, but it wasn't enough to hide the indomitable desire that burned in his eyes.

"Don't come, Jennie," he grunted, his voice restrained. "Do you realize what you're doing?"

"I know," she whispered, her face flushed. "Last time... It's because you helped me last time." Although she didn't know what a Kurkan in heat felt like, Jennie could clearly remember what she had felt when she had taken that adulterated drink. A horrible pain ignited her body, leaving her feverish, itchy and desperate to break free. Liam could be going through the same pain. "So, this time, I'm going to help you."

"With your body?"

'Must you say something so obvious out loud?' Jennie felt a little embarrassed, but nodded hesitantly.

"You are kind, Jennie." Liam's eyes narrowed as he smiled, trying to hide his discomfort. "But don't you really have another reason?"

"....."

Jennie didn't respond. In fact, she was prepared. She was tempted by him, by the man in front of her. Her reasoning might argue against getting involved with Liam, but her body remembered the pleasure he could give her. He attracted her, so she wanted to reciprocate.

Jennie felt the heat rising in her neck. She enjoyed the feel of her skin on his, the warm intimacy of his touch. She liked the way they bonded as one, she liked how he could set her mind free and get rid of any worries or thoughts. Those were the only times she could forget the burdens and complicated situations that clouded her daily life, even if only temporarily.

'Once again, just once more. This is the last one.'

With this imperfect excuse driving her, Jennie approached Liam. Liam's eyes shone sinisterly as he watched her. Jennie stopped in front of Liam before looking up. With the most determined expression and the most assertive voice she could muster, she said as she drew closer.

"We should deal with this first," she said. Then, she looked directly into Liam's eyes and bravely, though gently, took his arm in her small hands.

Liam withdrew his arm. "It's okay," he insisted.

The lie was so obvious that not even the most naive child in the world would believe it. Jennie ignored him and gently made him sit down on the floor.

Then she sat down across from him.

Since the inside of her dress was made of soft fabric, it would be easy to turn it into a bandage for her wound. However, Jennie struggled for a while, trying to tear off a considerable piece without success.

Liam laughed at her feeble attempts before intervening, stopping her clumsy hands. And then, he tore a piece.

"....."

A long strip was quickly torn off by Liam, making Jennie blush. Realizing the difference between their strength, Jennie was overcome with shame. She had been trying to tear off a piece, while Liam had succeeded in doing so instantly.

Jennie took the torn cloth and wrapped it carefully, but tightly around Liam's arm. The bleeding stopped, but then, Liam wrapped his thick arms around her waist.

"Come here," he muttered.

Liam had Jennie sit on his legs while she was still surprised. The back of his hand caressed her neck, inhaling deeply.

"There is a sweet aroma...emanating from you..."

Liam must have smelled the fragrant wine that the slave Kurkan served him long ago. Jennie shrugged her shoulders slightly, feeling a little ticklish.

However, Liam immediately tightened his grip on her.

Bringing her close once more, he rubbed his face against her neck. Liam sighed deeply, his warm breath brushing against her skin.

Jennie flinched, letting out a small cry of surprise.

But she quickly calmed down and hurriedly wiped up the blood that had dripped down her arm. "Hold still. Bandages are hard to tie," she said.

However, Liam didn't seem to care about his wound.

While Jennie struggled trying to wrap his forearm, he was busy pawing at her body. His hands groped her all over. Then, with a movement of his hand, he removed Jennie's wig and tossed it aside. Every time Liam made a move, Jennie could feel Liam's thighs moving under her ass, destabilizing her.

"If you keep moving, I won't be able to do this properly...!"

Instead of understanding Jennie's worry, Liam ignored her complaints, feeling content with his own actions. "Sometimes, it's okay to be sick."

Jennie gave up and tied the bandage roughly.

Carefully treating Liam's wound while he was still writhing was useless, it was better to finish treating him quickly.

Because of the thickness of her forearm, she had used more fabric than she expected. As she tied the last knot, his muscles contracted. She looked at him, asking, "Doesn't it hurt?"

He answered without thinking. "It hurts."

"Is it too tight? Do you want me to loosen the bandage a little?" asked Jennie, worried that she had been too careless.

"No, it's not that," Liam said, his voice sounded husky. And when he lifted his hips, something large, warm and firm bumped into her from underneath.

She could feel the solid outline of his manhood and froze. "Here," he whispered.

Jennie was still as a statue. Her hands, which had been moving awkwardly on Liam's arm before, stopped touching him. They remained in the air trembling, as Liam licked Jennies ear and whispered, "Can you treat this too?"

"...Shut up before I tie that with a bandage too."

Jennie's face was flushed while she finished adjusting the knot of the blindfold, ignoring Liam's laughter. Before she could feel satisfied with her accomplishment, however, Liam deftly caressed Jennie's cheeks.

"Please touch me, Jennie," he pleaded.

Jennie suddenly regretted offering her help. She wanted to take it all back, but at the same time, she didn't. As Jennie struggled with her inner conflict, Liam's erection pressed against her body once again, and the intense heat of the erection made her lose her sanity.

She climbed off his lap and knelt on the floor in front of Liam, between his legs. Jennie breathed with determination. She reached her trembling hand forward and slowly unraveled the top of his pants.

She tried to remind herself that she was doing this only to help Liam, who had suffered an arm wound to save her, but she was anxious, disconcerted by the daring nature of her actions.

As she was about to pull down his underpants, the last barrier standing between her and his raw skin, she hesitated for a considerable time. She could see the distinct cylindrical outline of his form, and it frightened her.

However, despite her protests internally, her hand moved as if it had a mind of its own, tugging at the thin fabric of Liam's underwear. Out came his thick and throbbing manhood.

Although she had experienced him inside her several times before, this was the first time she had simply touched him. Jennie's eyes widened as his manhood swelled even more. Now that she was sober, the shape and color of his manhood would remain etched in her brain very vividly.

Already dripping at its tip, Liam's erection seemed to throb and increase in size the more she looked at him. She watched it lengthen until it reached his abdomen.

'Even in these circumstances, I have to do something...'

She wondered how she could help him get back to normal. Then, she thought of Liam's personality, a man without a conscience, and wanted to put it inside her.

"You look like you're about to eat him."

"....."

Jennie avoided looking at his manhood before carefully reaching out to touch it with her fingertips.

It was warm. Even though she didn't know what to do, she held it in her small hand. Its size was unusually large, and it was difficult to hold in one hand, so she took it with both hands, unsure how to proceed. Other than her curiosity, she knew nothing, so she looked to Liam for guidance.

He was staring at her, studying her every movement and expression.

"Try moving your hands," he said. "Without too much abruptness..."

At his request, her long fingers brushed his foreskin.

Jennie felt heat rise to her cheeks, warming her body. She bowed her head to hide her blush and closed her eyes so as not to watch her hand on his manhood. But she couldn't block out the sound of her



caresses, nor Liam's husky voice, infused with pleasure.

"Oh, haaa..."

The heavy and low noises were coaxing her ears. As if struggling to control himself, Liam grabbed Jennie's waist, slapping her ass several times, whispering her name like a mantra.

"Jennie..."

Every time he mentioned her name, Jennie felt something strange inside her. A tingling sensation gripped her, messing into her insides. Sharp teeth bit lightly into Jennie's neck, scraping the smooth surface of her skin before releasing her. The man's action awakened strange desires in her.

Liam slowly raised his head and Jennie gently opened her eyes. When their gazes met, she couldn't help herself. She rushed forward, kissing his lips.

Liam pressed Jennie's mouth against his, and nibbled it. Even as she snorted and felt breathless, he didn't let her go. Saliva dripped from the corners of Jennie's lips as he greedily devoured her mouth.

Her body trembled. Inadvertently, she rubbed the tip of his glans and moved her fingers along it. It looked like something was going to come out of Liam because he tensed, and Jennie's hand throbbed.

Liam stopped kissing her and cried out loudly.

"Ugh, Jennie..."

Hot jets of sticky semen spurted from the tip, splashing onto Jennie's face.

"Ah..." Jennie was stunned, speechless from the hot substance that now covered her skin. The sensation of heat and wetness made her unable to move. She lay still, and could only blink owlishly.

Liam stared at Jennie as if under a spell. Then his face contorted and his eyes glowed with intensity.



## Chapter 55

### Chapter 55 — Difficult to Siate

The sight of her beautiful face marked with his fluids was too much. Desire roared through him and Liam pounced, tipping her over in one swift movement.

Crouching over her with his hands digging into the ground, Liam looked more like a predator than a lover, a hunt ending with the prey pinned and helpless.

Startled by the abrupt move, Jennie froze for a moment. She could not move an inch. There was pain from the force of his grip on her wrist, and she was mortified and frightened, suddenly remembering the Kurkan boy who had gone berserk and attacked her.

Their morbid situation must have driven him into a frenzy and made him lose his reason. The thought filled her with fear and a shudder ran through her body, which did not go unnoticed by her captor. He laughed, tightening his grip, and Jennie swallowed her fear and glared up at him.

"You really aren't afraid." His lips twisted with amusement, but his eyes were glowing with danger.

As their eyes locked, his manhood began to harden again, lengthening and grazing her tender abdomen, rigid and pulsing with heat. His intentions were crystal clear.

"If you were thinking, you should have run away..."

The whisper had barely reached her ears before her clothes were ripped away, revealing the pink nipples of her breasts. They looked so tempting in the moonlight, and no wolf would waste the opportunity to taste and savor them. The light of his reason was guttering like a candle flame, flickering down to darkness, and Liam managed one more warning.

"This is your last chance, Jennie..."

He meant it. If she pushed him away and ran, he wouldn't stop her. There would not be another chance.

Fear simmered inside her. Her heart was pounding.

She knew the danger and pleasure that awaited her, and she was trembling unceasingly...but this maybe this was her last chance in another way. And Jennie chose not to squander it.

Liam had said he couldn't help being unreasonable...

If she were in her right mind, she wouldn't have gotten involved with him in the first place.

Instead of answering, Jennie reached out and slid her hands behind his neck, pulling him closer. That guttering fire instantly ignited at her touch and Liam turned his head, muttering something in the Kurkan tongue that she couldn't understand.

"You..." He lifted his face to her, voicing a low and eerie warning. "You're...really bad...I'm going to lose my mind..."

His hand grabbed her breast and like a hungry beast he bit at the bud between his fingers, the tingling touch surging through her body as a short moan escaped her pink lips. Her softly arched hips moved up and down sensually.

His avid gaze noted the slightest reaction, the faintest sigh. Her breasts swelled upward, hardening, and Liam relinquished her breasts in satisfaction, stripping away the remnants of her torn clothes. She tried instinctively to cover her body with her delicate hands, but it was too late. Liam pushed them away, gripping them as his eyes traveled over her body, downward...and there between her legs, looking at the damp cloth clinging to her folds.

"What is this?" He laughed low, rubbing his fingers over her underwear. "Already wet. Did you get excited by touching mine?"

She wished he would feign ignorance at times like this, but Liam never passed up such an opportunity. She could never admit it. Her face burned hotter with every breath, and she turned her face away, waiting for him to continue. Moments passed in anticipation, and

when she finally looked back, Liam was sitting with his legs apart, leaning against the steel bars with mischief in his eyes. He knew exactly what her heart desired.

"You do it." He laughed as she blinked at him, bewildered. "It would be nice if you did..."

He didn't finish the sentence, trailing off with a quiet smile that didn't conceal his excitement. His patience was wearing thin.

Jennie rose and approached Liam, moving over his body. Looking down at his manhood, she lost confidence. It was so rigid, it stood up straight above his belly, and she hesitated as she slowly bent. At his tip made contact with her garden, a deep groan echoed. Her hips moved, up, down, as she searched for a rhythm.

Her hips quivered as the rounded tip slowly thrust into her. The hands at her sides moved, taking control, and her gasp reverberated through the room.

"Hnnnnn..."

She couldn't get used to his size, no matter how hard she tried, and as he moved against her she looked up at him, her eyes on the verge of tears. But the man had no mercy and no intention of stopping. Liam's hands massaged her hips, cupping her round backside, trying to make her relax.

"You need to bend down more, I'm not even halfway there."

Her eyes darkened. She was sure that at least half of him must already be inside her, she felt him all the way into her stomach, there was no more room to put it inside. Even now it was unbelievable to think that all of him had fit in the past. Her eyes were shining as she hovered above him, already certain that she couldn't take it anymore, but Liam had no intention of letting her go.

Long fingers moved between her legs and Liam drew back his wet, erect manhood, rubbing it against her.

Her hands squeezed his forearm in panic.

"No..." She whispered.

"You're squeezing my wound." Liam told her, grabbing his bandaged arm. Jennie hurriedly pulled her hand away and he seized the opportunity to stroke against her again.

"... Ah.... Li...am..."

His fingers were relentless, rubbing hard, twisting, pinching the excited nub between her legs. It was an unbearable sensation, fluttering and tickling, as if a small insect was tormenting her. The moment he stopped, the strength in her legs left her and she started as his manhood slid across her wet tissues.

".....!"

She threw her head back, her eyes wide as she gasped, her arms and legs jerking in a shuddering spasm. Saliva moistened her lips, but she couldn't even close her mouth. All she could do was tremble.

Liam moved closer. Sucked her tongue. For a time she was lost in his voracious kiss, and when she came to her senses and looked down, she could see her belly bulging with the contour of his manhood.

The tears that had been threatening welled up and overflowed, and she regretted her stupidity. It was insane to desire something so mad and overwhelming, and she swallowed her sobs, burying her face in Liam's chest. But however pathetic she looked, he gave her no respite. His impatience for her was far more urgent and his waist moved up and down, a rhythmic pounding assaulting her. At the obscene sounds, Jennie instantly climaxed.

"Uhhhh..."

Her body arched with pleasure so intense, she felt bruised. But before that first climax was over, another wave of pleasure followed as Liam delved recklessly into her, giving up any illusion of patience. His big manhood pounded into her stomach, rubbing everything inside her, stroking his favorite spots, surging so deep it was terrifying. His eyes glowed as she moved her body with his, her hips bumping against his. In defiance of the darkness around him, her vision flashed white.

Struggling, her hands grasped the cold iron window bars. She tried to hold them, grasping for some control, but she was experiencing a pleasure beyond the limits of her body, so vast it was impossible even to moan. She felt as if she were on fire and pleas spilled from her mouth.

"Please, please..."

Liam bit her neck hard enough to leave the marks of his teeth.

"What, what!?" he growled in irritation.

"Please stop..."

"Do you want me to stop?" He taunted mischievously.

"Yes...uhh...please..." She implored, fighting to control her body and her shattered senses .

"Why... I haven't put it in for a minute..." Liam looked down at her face as she sobbed and pleaded, but never paused. His hand grabbed her mound and twisted her nipple, and more tears spilled from her eyes.

"Oh, ah...!"

Her body jolted and stick wetness spilled all the way down to her backside. Liam kissed her as she struggled, whispering to her as he licked away her tears.

"Tell me you want it inside..."

She would never have said it if she were in her right mind, but she was lost to reason, and she said it, the words frantic.

"Inside...please... Liam...!"

Her words whipped him into a frenzy. The beast burst free of his bonds and his manhood thrust deep, deeper. Jennie kissed his cheeks, bit his lips, her nails digging into his shoulders as she yielded to his wild motions.

"Oh, God... I think I'm going to die...please..."

Her head tilted back as she pleaded, her belly tightening as he penetrated harder into her. Liam's eyebrows furrowed as he gripped her, his face twisted.

"All right..."

Hot semen shot into her. Jennie's body arched and went rigid as the liquid filled her insides, and she collapsed over Liam's body, her hands twisting as she moaned. Her whole body was trembling in a painful, endless climax, and even as she writhed she felt him swell inside her again.

Jennie gaped at the ravenous beast before her.

"You told me you were going to help me, didn't you?"

Even though he had already come twice, his golden eyes were burning with desire. He lifted her up, and when he slid out of her, rivulets of liquid flowed down her thighs.

Liam licked his lips. "I haven't had enough help yet. "

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## Chapter 56

### Chapter 56 — Please, stop

The dark night was a bottomless abyss of devilish and sinful desire.

They had already done it twice and still the man's hunger wasn't satisfied. Jennie wasn't surprised by his insatiable lust; she thought she knew how voracious he was, how vigorous. But now she was aware of how incredibly naive she had been. Help him? She had entered the lair of a starving beast and offered herself on a platter.

His manhood was tireless. How many times would he want her before he was satisfied? Two, three, four? Would the beast be satisfied by dawn? Sobbing, Jennie slapped his shoulder, wordlessly protesting.

"What? Did you get bored with this position? Do you want me to have you on your back?" asked Liam, who knew that wasn't the trouble. Turning her around, he pushed her into the iron bars, their hardness crushing her breasts as his body pushed into her from behind. The bars were cool against her cheek as Jennie took a breath and lifted her hips.

Liam gripped her and slid his manhood over her, brushing into her wetness.

A burning pleasure coursed through her body. A light kiss brushed her shoulder, sending sparks through her, the beginning of a fire that she thought had been thoroughly quenched.

Liam squeezed her breast and whispered, "You have gained a little weight."

Though she had been drifting and nearly asleep, Jennie stiffened, surprised. Cerdina had been distracted, so Jennie had been eating all she wanted.

The effect on her body must be obvious. She was instantly ashamed and gripped the bars, wishing she could cover herself. She had to be

careful and control herself...

Her eyelashes quivered as she blinked, hesitating, and finally asked quietly, "is that a bad thing...?"

The simple question made her heart pound fiercely.

She expected him to laugh nonchalantly and list all the defects of her imperfect body. She wanted him to point out every place where she had gained weight, to humiliate her with sarcasm and...

It was just as well that she had her back to him. He couldn't see her impatience and anxiety as she waited for his answer. But Liam only brushed her hair aside to reveal her slender white neck and gently covered it with kisses.

"What?" he asked gruffly.

"I've gained weight, so..."

Liam licked along her earlobe and whispered, "I like this much better. If you gained a little more here, you would be even more perfect."

His tongue licked and his teeth bit again and again, tasting her as he told her in a dozen ways how amazing he thought her. Her shoulders shrugged in embarrassment and her insides twisted, her heart pounding just as it had before she asked the question. But she felt strangely complete, the anxiety and nervousness vanishing.

"....."

She pressed her hot face against the cold iron bars, and Liam had no time for further idle talk. His manhood was swelling further and working its way into the core of her body, opening her. A deep moan echoed in the silent night as his hot breath brushed her neck, and his body molded against hers as he pounded her so hard, she rose up on her toes, almost lifted from the ground due to the difference in their heights.

Grasping her swelling n!pples, he squeezed, twisting them, an obscene milking movement. The pain and pleasure invaded her, he was attacking her from above and below and she couldn't take it, it

was too much. Trembling, she swallowed and managed to plead.

"Ahhh... not my breasts..."

"You don't want this, you don't want that." Liam squeezed both nipples and a moan escaped her as she quivered on her toes. His voice sounded behind her. "Help me with this, Jennie. What can I do?"

"One...ah...just do one..."

She meant either his caresses of her chest or his relentless thrusts from below, but Liam took it differently.

"Just one?" He chuckled, moving his hand down, his finger pressing against her clitoris and making her body shudder wildly. He wiggled his finger and whispered mischievously.

"You're so greedy. I only have two hands, after all."

He was making her sound like a lewd woman, but when she opened her mouth to protest, only moans escaped.

The panting noises echoed in this empty place, loud and clear. She tried to move, unable to bear it, but was trapped by the iron bars in front of her and Liam pushing into her from behind. His manhood kept moving inside her as her breasts bounced up and down, and her body trembled as he deftly stroked and pinched her nipples.

Jennie was sobbing in pain. Balanced on tiptoe, her thighs were tiring rapidly, but if she lowered herself even a little she was impaled on his manhood. She was trapped, overwhelmed by the sensations she was feeling, and her mind kept going blank as he pushed her to the point that she couldn't stand it anymore.

".....!"

Something was trying to burst out of her. The pressure was too much, every time his manhood rubbed her inner walls, she felt like something was going to come out, that she had to...

Jennie called out to Liam urgently.

"Liam, haaa, wait..."

She desperately grabbed his forearm.

"Wait...wait, stop...ah, no..." She begged.

"What do you mean no, don't you like it so much?" He panted, ignoring her as she scratched him with her sharp nails, pushing relentlessly into her. He curled his hips to make the sounds wetter, almost as if he were tasting it, and whispered, "you're too wet down here."

It was humiliating, but she had to tell him the truth. "Liam, I think I'm going to...pee..."

Liam licked her tear-stained cheeks as he drove his manhood harder into her inner walls.

"Okay. Do it."

"Haaa... Please, stop..."

His finger rubbed harder against her clitoris and the inside of her clit squeezed as she shook her head from side to side, pleading desperately. "No...ah, what are you doing? I can't stand it, heukkkkkk!"

A spasm shook her body and her feet gave out under her, her body convulsing as she slid down onto him, impaled. She couldn't take it, he was so deep!

"Ha, ahhhh!"

Her hips jerked forward and a stream of liquid burst between her legs, a clear fluid dripping to the floor, slicking her legs and thighs. Jennie moaned, shocked at her body's betrayal, she couldn't believe she had...it wasn't like she was a child, it was so embarrassing!

"I told you to stop!" she wailed. "Why....?!"

It wouldn't have happened if he had let her go. She was stunned by what had happened and confused by what her body was doing. It

wasn't...pee, it had no smell, and then she realized that Liam hadn't spoken in a while.

"Liam...?" She called him by name.

It took a moment for him to respond, his voice a tense and rumbling bass.

"Haa, Jennie..."

His breathing was heavy, rasping.

"I told you not to act so erotic..."

His hands gripped the iron bars as he groaned, deep and agonized, trapping Jennie between his arms, his forearms on either side of her face. Veins bulged in each meaty forearm, muscle quivered, and in his grip the iron bars bent with a squeak.

"Haa...I'm sorry..." he whispered, his voice thready with distress. "Sorry..."

She hadn't expected an apology. Jennie inhaled. This felt dangerous. Something strange was happening inside her, the tension in his voice transferring to her body. At first she thought she had been imagining it, but now she was sure it was real.

"Li...Liam..." She was really scared, her voice shaking as she called his name. "It feels...strange inside..."

His manhood was swelling. A lot.

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## Chapter 57

### Chapter 57 — Don't worry

She could feel his manhood swelling. The sensation was vivid and disconcerting as he throbbed and lurched inside her, pressing against the softest parts of her, pushing into her organs until she thought she was going to burst. The pain took her breath away, her inner walls stretching as if they were going to tear, and Jennie screamed.

"Agh...it hurts...!"

Liam was deaf to her screams, his breath hard and heavy. His sharp teeth sank into the back of her neck as his erection writhed in her like a snake, and he emptied himself inside her. His hot, viscous come coated her inner walls. He seemed determined not to let a drop escape, pushing ever deeper, and Jennie could feel him filling her, spurts going deep into her sensitive channel.

It seemed inhuman. Far beyond Jennie's capabilities. She remembered the warning, You won't be able to resist a Kurkan on a full moon. Now she finally understood what it meant, the terrible weight behind every word. She floundered, trying to move and shift and relieve the pain, and then she remembered that Kurkans needed to meet certain conditions to induce pregnancy. Her eyes went wide.

No. There was no way...

Blinking in horror, she tried to push him away, struggling against him.

"Ah! No, you can't..."

She really might get pregnant this time. It seemed impossible that she wouldn't conceive, given the amount of his semen inside her. Terrified, she tried to push him out, pull away from him, but his manhood refused to budge.

"Please, Liam, take it out!" She screamed, sobbing, and finally shook him back to his senses. Liam jerked as if he were coming out of a

spell, his teeth releasing their hold on her neck.

"Heuk...sorry, Jennie..."

Taking her in his arms, he laid her on her side on the floor, and Jennie sobbed like a child in his embrace.

"Does it hurt so much? Don't cry..."

"Take it out, take it out..."

"...No, if I pull it out now, it will tear you."

Caressing her swollen belly, he hugged her and kissed her cheeks, his tongue gently licking the bite marks he had left on her neck.

"Just hold on a little longer," he soothed. "It will be over soon."

"But if...if you keep it in....I'll get pregnant...ugh, please..."

"No, it's okay," he assured her. "That's not true."

He kept soothing her, trying to stifle her cries. She was sure he was lying, his erection showed no sign of softening. It felt as if it would never end and she would be trapped like this, torturously impaled on him. She was so shocked and overwhelmed that she couldn't stop squirming, trying to resist, her nails scratching his arms and thighs, even raking his calves with her toes. Liam's long legs intertwined with hers and she moaned, protesting.

"No..."

"...Jennie, stop moving."

Pinning her down firmly, he forced her to stop struggling. His body was so hot, baking her, making her temperature spike. She went rigid as she felt something move in her, her limbs going limp as Liam came again inside her. She could clearly feel the heat of the flood of semen, and she clutched at her stomach, wailing again.

"Aaah!"

"Haa, haa...mmnn!"

Liam cried out loudly and held her tighter, his hips shaking as if he could hardly stand the stimulation. Even that small movement made Jennie convulse as his swollen manhood stretched her, and her eyes rolled back in her head at the pain, the pleasure, and she squirted again.

Liquid gushed down her legs as her inner muscles spasmed frantically. Liam must have found the sensations unbearable, every subsequent squeeze more euphoric than the last. The sweet friction engulfed his manhood until he couldn't stand it any longer. He had to move. Impossibly, he began to thrust into her again.

Jennie tried to hold back, but every time Liam rammed into her, more liquid burst out of her, splattering onto the floor. She was shattered, saliva trailing from her open mouth as tears cascaded down her cheeks.

"Agh, ah..."

She sobbed. She felt soaked all over, confused by the substances pouring into her and out of her. When the river flowing out of her body finally ceased, she was nerveless, with no strength to do anything but yield to Liam.

It was a very painful pleasure. She had nothing left, and he was still hard, coming into her endlessly, flooding her with his semen. Her consciousness sputtered, fluttering. She dimly heard his soft sigh as he covered her eyes with his hand, and her vision darkened completely as she fainted.

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Sex with Liam never ended normally. It always continued until she couldn't take it anymore, with him pushing her physical and mental limits to breaking point. If they kept going this way, it could only end with her untimely death. Jennie was sure that it really could kill her.

She was drifting in confusion, just on the edge of lucidity, when a voice brought her back to her senses.



"You really have no conscience. You were very hard on her..."

Was this a dream or reality? Jennie lay still as she listened, unable to even lift her eyelids. The speaker continued, a litany of complaints.

"You didn't have a ceremony, so she shouldn't be pregnant, but still you have gone too far! What will we do now that you've bitten her like this? The princess has to wear dresses!"

A firm hand slid gently through Jennie's hair, stroking affectionately. The sensation came through a haze, and she found it a little uncomfortable.

"I agree. Liam, you have been too hard this time," said a second voice.

"It's amazing that the princess made it back alive!" exclaimed the first voice.

"Haban. Gennin."

Another voice joined the conversation, unconcerned.

"Get out of here. I'll listen to all your complaints later." A hand cupped her cheek, and the speaker let out a faint laugh. "You're both too noisy. She'll wake up because of you."

The other two voices instantly fell silent. Once it seemed they weren't going to speak again, Jennie felt fatigue wash over her once more, and she drifted back to sleep under that caressing hand, as if it were gently leading her to oblivion.

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"....."

When Jennie finally opened her eyes, she found that her head was resting on a muscular thigh. Blinking, she looked up, trying to get her bearings. A warm hand brushed her hair back from her eyes.

"Are you awake?"

Jennie stirred. Her body was numb and her mind was foggy, and

Liam shifted her so she could lean against his chest. His large hands held her carefully, as if she were made of fine and fragile porcelain.

Bending his head, he kissed her lovingly, and cold water flowed from his mouth into hers. Jennie swallowed automatically, and Liam put a jug to his lips, then let her drink it from him again. Thirstily, she swallowed every drop, and once she was sufficiently hydrated, Liam's tongue followed the water between her lips, licking her teeth and tickling the roof of her mouth.

"Aaah..."

A small moan escaped her and he chuckled, moving closer for another kiss. One hand gently caressed her cheek and curved under her chin, sliding down to her breasts. Slipping under the thin material of her nightgown, he pinched her sensitive nipples with his thumb and forefinger.

Her hips moved on their own in dreamy response, spurred by the sensations. The hand at her back slid down, patting her backside in passing, brushing against her thighs to tug the hem of her nightgown. His fingertips brushed her growing wetness and she came back to her senses with a jolt.

"Aaah, Liam!"

Quickly, she pushed him away, and Liam retreated obediently, smiling as he lifted his hand to lick his fingers. Her cloudy mind cleared and memories of the previous night flooded back. Jennie glanced down at her belly reflexively and then up at Liam.

Her face was pale.

"Don't worry, you're not pregnant." he said, in answer to her mortification.

Jennie pursed her lips. How? It was impossible that she wouldn't be. She clearly remembered his manhood pulsing inside her, flooding her with impossible amounts of his s3men.

"Lies..."

Liam chuckled.

"If you are questioning my fertility, you are mistaken. We must perform a ceremony before mating to allow pregnancy. All Kurkans must do so."

Jennie closed her eyes, breathing a deep sigh of relief. He hugged her and whispered mischievously in her ear.

"What? Are you sad? Did you want to have a baby with me?"

"....."

"Or did you have fun yesterday? If you want, I'll always do it like last night."

She stared at him and Liam laughed.

"How long was I asleep?"

"Not very long. The sun hasn't risen yet."

At least she had awakened early. Jennie was relieved, but Liam frowned as if disappointed. She ignored him, rising hurriedly. But while her mind was prepared, her body was not. Her legs wobbled and she would have collapsed immediately if Liam hadn't moved quickly to catch her.

"Where are you going?"

The answer was obvious, but she said it anyway.

"To the palace. I have to get back."

"Leave after breakfast." As if he had been expecting her rejection, Liam smiled, his eyes warm. "If you have breakfast with me, I'll tell you something interesting."

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## Chapter 58

### Chapter 58 — The Blood Of A Wolf

Jennie hesitated. She wanted to ask Liam many things, but more than anything she just wanted to walk away. It was hard to look him in the face when moments from last night kept flashing through her mind, visions of endless and frightening sex haunting her.

She had cried and struggled like an overwhelmed child. Her senses had been pushed to their limits. It had been primal and raw and Liam had succumbed completely to primitive impulses she couldn't begin to understand. The ordeal was seared into her mind, and the memory of his touch made her writhe with embarrassment. It was too much, all of it. Clenching her fists, her nails bit into her palms as she spoke.

"Whatever it is, I don't need to know."

She tried to summon her regal bearing as she pushed him away, her legs wobbling beneath her, but she had barely gone two steps when something caught the hem of her dress. It wasn't Liam. He was standing by the bed, silently watching. Her dress was caught on something, a nail in the floor, and even bending over to free it was simply beyond her.

She gave up. The frustration was evident on her face as she fell back toward the bed, and Liam smiled down at her.

"You can't go back alone. You can't even walk."

Wrapping Jennie up in his arms, he carried her to the bed, shaping a backrest from the pillows and tucking a blanket over her. Content with his efforts, he gently kissed her forehead.

"Wait a moment, okay? I'll get you something delicious."

He shrugged into a coat and slipped out the door, his footsteps fading into the distance. With the room empty, Jennie took the opportunity to observe her surroundings. It was a fairly large room, so she assumed it must be one of the finer inns, furnished with heavy

furniture, opulent and grand. Beside her on the bed was the paper Liam had been reading when she woke up.

All of it was in Kurkan. He must have been writing while she slept; the ink was still fresh, shiny with moisture. Jennie studied the text. Though Liam's penmanship in the language of Estia was poor, his calligraphy in his native tongue was impeccable. The lines were bold, and fierce, but there was still a sense of artistry.

The door opened and Liam reappeared, carrying a tray laden with plates piled high with food. Fruits, meats, breads, sweetmeats, an enormous variety and to her eyes, enough to feed the change of guard at the palace. She had to stifle a gasp as he set it down before her.

Was she supposed to eat all that?

Maybe he meant for her to take a small bite of each dish, like at a banquet. The Kurkans were almost ostentatious in their consumption of food, but there was no reason to eat so much, especially in the morning.

"I brought you something light," Liam explained. "Just to break your fast."

Jennie stared. The table beside the bed was all but groaning under the load.

"But tell me if you want more," he added. "You burned a lot of energy last night."

"....."

It reminded Jennie of Genin's breakfast. Apparently the Kurkans were used to eating this way.

Liam nudged the table closer to the bed and dragged over a chair for himself, sitting down opposite her. Jennie scooted forward on the bed to eat from her own small plate, accepting a knife and fork from Liam. They were small, as if they had been created specifically for her hands.

Liam plunged his hands into a bowl of water and then tore into the bread with them, ignoring the niceties of plate and utensils. Watching him eat with such enthusiasm stimulated her appetite. The food was unfamiliar, but it tasted delicious, and her fork and knife neatly sliced and transferred her portion to her mouth. Vegetables, and then a thin slice of flat toast with cheese on top, salty and savory. There was a steamed dish rolled inside leaves, finely ground meat with fragrant spices, stuffed with grape leaves and cooked in a pot. The rich odor nearly made her salivate, and before she knew it, she had eaten three.

She had already eaten too much, but each dish was more curious than the last. Another dish resembled yogurt, but it was a strange creamy color, and when she tasted a spoonful, it had a smoky flavor that wound its way down into her throat. After five more spoonfuls, she identified it as some variety of eggplant.

She almost took a sixth bite when she realized how much she had eaten and set her spoon down, startled. Liam glanced at her as she pushed the dish away.

"Are you done?"

"Too much." She really shouldn't have eaten any of the yogurt-thing, but all of the food was so delicious, and unlike anything else she had ever eaten before. But it was no excuse. She regretted her lack of self-control.

"Well, eat some fruit."

He wasn't making a suggestion. He was giving her a command.

Despite her refusal, Liam lifted a grape to Jennie's mouth, teasingly tracing it over her lips until she finally conceded and accepted it. He was impossible.

But the grape was sweet and delicious, and she held it on her tongue for a moment to savor it. As soon as the first was gone, Liam was pressing another on her, and this time she refused, and meant it.

Fortunately, he desisted.

"Then drink some tea."

Nudging a cup of hot tea toward her, he bent his head to his own meal. She was so used to pecking at her food, it was strange to see someone eat with such appetite, working steadily through each dish on the tray, one after another. As he shifted another plate over, Jennie cried out a protest.

"No!"

Liam looked up in surprise, a palm date halfway to his lips. His eyebrows lifted.

"What?"

"Just...not those," she said awkwardly, her face heating. The last thing Liam needed to eat was food that boosted his stamina. He humored her without requiring a further explanation, and she scanned the tray for any other dangerous dishes. If they ate together again in future, she would have to keep a wary eye out for hazardous foodstuffs. Anything that enhanced Liam's energy would ultimately have the opposite effect on her.

Pushing the tray aside, he poured himself a cup of tea.

"You don't have to worry about Count Valtein. He's being treated well here."

That was one of the things she had wanted to ask him earlier, so she was grateful for the reassurance. Liam looked at her, and then spoke again.

"And... I'm sorry I surprised you last night."

Jennie's face burned. It was the subject she most wanted to avoid. Shifting her teacup to hide her face, she forced herself to ask.

"What... What happened to you? It was so strange..."

"Have you ever seen a dog penis?"

No one else would have dared to ask the Princess of Estia such a

question. Liam frowned as she shook her head. For a moment he looked troubled, as if he were searching for the proper words.

"I hope you have heard, at least, that Kurkans carry the blood of beasts. I possess the blood of a wolf. That is how beasts act when they reproduce."

Jennie pictured a wolf, dark brown and golden-eyed, like Liam. Unable to resist her curiosity, she asked, "Can you turn into an animal?"

Hearing her pose the absurd question so seriously, he burst out laughing.

"No. We don't have that talent, princess."

People called them abominations. Jennie saw that knowledge in Liam's eyes, the word drenched in bitterness. So little was known about Kurkans in the outside world, leaving their culture, customs, and history open to speculation. Most had heard that they had the blood of beasts in their veins, but nothing more was certain.

Jennie had tried to investigate further. Most of the people on the mainland despised the Kurkans as barbarians, so even scholars had never taken an interest. It was difficult when she wanted to understand them, and not just as leverage for negotiations. The more she learned, the more curious she became about the country of Liam's birth, the culture to which he belonged, the people that he led.

She wanted to know more about Liam.

Once she realized the dreadful direction her thoughts were heading, she swiftly cut them off.

"You should be thankful I don't turn into a rampaging beast," Liam was saying. "It would be hard for you to handle, princess."

Of course, he had no idea what she had been thinking, and she pretended calm, shifting the conversation.

"The important thing is the slavers," she said. "I have to address the root of the problem."



The slave traders were dead. No nobles of high status were included on the list of casualties, but nobles considered slave auctions vulgar, and sent representatives instead of attending themselves. No one would object now. No one would want to draw attention to the event.

But of course, that wouldn't change public opinion, which would remain hostile to the Kurkans.

Liam chuckled softly, setting down his teacup.

Jennie's cup was still almost untouched.

"Will there be negotiations when we get back?" She asked.

His eyes closed. Kurkans had an ingrained thirst for victory.

"The thought excited me so much, I could hardly sleep, princess."

"You're not answering me," Jennie said, avoiding his eyes as they slitted open.

"Ah."

She had asked the question without expecting much. Liam might have said anything. But he exceeded her expectations. He dropped his bombshell lightly.

"The princess is very excited."

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## Chapter 59

### Chapter 59 — Gypsies

The sky was dark. Moist air covered the forest in a thick blanket, wafting through the trees, stirring their leaves with uneasy breezes that warned of rain. Dozens of people crowded into the area to breathe the fresh air, all present to witness the prince's hunt.

A hound scoured the damp earth while squires chased away the smaller prey, clearing the Prince's path so he could hunt more easily.

Count Weddleton stood next to the Crown Prince, holding their horses by their reins. As Cerdina's biological father, Count Weddleton was obliged to follow Jongin when he decided to go hunting, even though Jongin did not care for his companionship.

The Count brought up several topics over the course of their conversation, skirting his real topic until he finally mustered the courage to broach the subject.

"Was there any discussion of reforming the tax system during the last cabinet council meeting?" he asked. The Prince's blue eyes flicked toward him, but despite their icy stare, the count refused to retreat.

"It seems Princess Jennie wants to press on, despite Seokjin's opposition..."

Prince Jongin raised an eyebrow. It was the only response to the Count's questions; his lips were pressed into a thin line. His expressionless face made the Count shiver nervously, and he thanked his lucky stars that Jongin's bow was focused on a distant bush, rather than something in his own direction.

Silence stretched between them. Jongin narrowed his eyes as a vein swelled in his hand, his arms straining with the effort to firmly draw the bowstring. The arrow flew the instant its point found a target, and an instant later, the bellow of a wounded creature echoed through the forest. A stag bounded out of the bushes, its huge antlers like ivory branches.

Stumbling forward, the deer's body struck the ground with a heavy thud. Warm, fresh blood flowed from its neck and squires quickly ran to inspect the fallen beast.

"Wonderful, Crown Prince!" Count Weddleton said cheerfully.

He had displayed exquisite marksmanship. Anyone else would have been pleased to demonstrate such mastery and fell a deer so soon, but Jongin simply watched silently.

"Send it to the Queen's palace," he said indifferently.

The squires hefted the deer carcass and Jongin stared at the place where it had lain, its blood still staining the flattened grass and soaking into the earth.

"I wonder if the barbarian king likes the hunt," he said slowly.

"How could he not?" Count Weddleton replied, as if he had been anxiously awaiting an opportunity to speak. "They are beasts by nature. The barbarians are said to forgo weapons altogether, and kill their prey with their bare hands."

There were plenty of such stories, and Count Weddleton was happy to speak ill of the barbarous Kurkans, who were also rumored to use their teeth to tear into their prey's flesh once they killed it.

Listening, Jongin laughed for the first time.

"I wouldn't mind hunting with him," he said, smiling.

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The incident with the slave traders had become a subject of gossip throughout Estia and the rest of the continent. Estia was the center of the slave trade, so such stories spread quickly and affected the rest of the black market. Slave traders had been eliminated and their wealth lost. With the supply of such a valuable commodity eliminated, the prices of the remainder of the slaves skyrocketed.

The nobles were enraged and would have complained about all the freed Kurkans roaming the streets, but they were forced to hold their

tongues. Slavery was illegal. The slave traders who had lined their pockets with filthy money were now inhabiting the underworld, so the nobles that had employed and patronized them didn't dare to become involved with the affair, lest they share their fate.

A rumor circulated claiming that Seokjin of Oberde would protest on behalf of the nobles at the next cabinet council meeting. Did he honestly believe that

Princess Jennie would quietly accept such a protest?

The Kurkans hated the man. But it seemed impossible that the matter would be resolved peacefully. Seokjin seemed determined to disrupt the upcoming negotiations with the Kurkans, and some claimed he was trying to provoke a military confrontation.

Jennie had to find a solution.

After the action against the slave traders, Count Valtein had lost a significant amount of weight. He had already explained to Jennie what had happened, after he had been separated from her that day.

"So I don't think I can eat meat at the moment... especially not anything raw..." he had concluded, downcast.

Count Valtein had become a strong advocate for friendly diplomatic relations with the Kurkans. Jennie praised his hard work and gave him a leave of absence. The man needed a few days off after what he had been through.

Together, they had decided not to increase the number of Kurkan hostages they would keep as bargaining chips. More were unnecessary. Unlike his predecessor, Liam was a king that went out of his way to protect his people. Jennie suspected that Liam would accept a deal even if they only had a single Kurkan.

Of course, with that in her favor, it made it much easier to commit to a peace treaty. Jennie was working hard to end the negotiations favorably, and while this was stressful enough, she always had other concerns.

The atmosphere in the royal palace had quickly soured. After Cerdina flaunted the purple silk dress that she had stolen from her, Jennie

ordered Countess Melissa to ignore the theft and effectively sweep it under the rug. But it wasn't because she intended to do nothing. With no investigation and no known culprit, the princess's ladies-in-waiting began to eye each other with suspicion. Those who truly served Jennie took it upon themselves to discover the detestable traitor.

If matters escalated and someone was proven guilty, then Jennie would have to intervene. The thought of a traitor bothered her, but the discord among her ladies-in-waiting was even more troubling.

Suddenly, Liam's voice echoed in her thoughts.

*—The queen is a Tomari.*

When he told her that, it left her speechless. Liam had laughed.

*—Do you want to know more?*

Stunned, Jennie nodded. She had almost spilled her cup of tea, her insides tight with tension.

*—I will tell you in the future, he said lightly, and maddeningly. Maybe you should use this as an excuse to see me again.*

He had predicted exactly what she would do. After their first night at the inn, she had been determined to never see him again, but somehow he always anticipated her and blocked every escape. And she had had no choice but to return the palace, with all her questions unanswered.

Of course, it was possible that Liam had lied, but they had not been discussing formal negotiations, and it had clearly not been a joke. The fact that Kurkans had had multiple altercations with Gypsies recently lent further credence to his claims. Gypsies were nearly as despised as Kurkans. Nobles would not accept intermarriage with Gypsies; it would be like marrying a Kurkan. If Cerdina was really of Gypsy descent, it could upend the royal household and even upset the succession. If Prince Jongin had Gypsy blood in his veins, it might be enough to keep him off the throne.

But as intriguing as all that way, Jennie knew better than to make an issue of it now. She needed more information first. But it kept

swimming to the surface of her mind. Even as she prepared to leave, she was thinking of Cerdina, replaying previous events in her mind and assimilating it with this new information.

"Princess," Countess Melissa said impatiently, "Are you sure you want to see him again?"

The question stopped Jennie in her tracks.

"I should..."

"I'm afraid he'll do something to you again."

"No. I don't think he will. But I admit I can't be sure." Jennie turned to the Countess. "Please, stay by my side."

"Of course," the Countess replied, her fists clenching with determination. Jennie smiled, and they moved on together. She needed to meet someone to do, but she couldn't trust her other ladies-in-waiting. Only the Countess was permitted to accompany her to the main palace where the nobles met.

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At the main palace, the nobles greeted Jennie and she returned their courtesies polite, scanning the crowd. It only took a moment before she found the man she was looking for, surrounded by a crowd and chatting happily until he sensed Jennie's gaze.

She moved toward him. His expression shifted at her approach, bewildered that she would come to him so openly, until she stopped directly in front of him.

That he dared to stare at her was rude and disrespectful, but everyone nearby was doing the same. Jennie had never been the first to approach him. She spoke first, leaning toward him.

Jennie began to walk towards the man. As she got closer, the man's expression became more bewildered. Even after she caught up with him, stopping her steps right in front of his eyes, he continued to stare at her in bewilderment. His gaze could be considered rude and disrespectful, but the other nobles around her looked at her in the

same way, astonished. Perhaps because Jennie had been the first to approach.

"Are you busy?"

The man looked at her as if his soul had left his body. "Oh, I'm not busy," he stammered.

"Then, let's talk for a moment, Seokjin of Oberde," she said politely.

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## Chapter 60

### Chapter 60 — Fiancée of Seokjin of Oberde

The easiest way to handle Seokjin was to capitalize on his weaknesses. Jennie knew that if she kept manipulating his sensitive ego, then he would inevitably make stupid and careless decisions.

Initially, she hadn't planned to do this, but the Kurkans' action at the auction house had put Seokjin at a disadvantage. Watching freed Kurkans boldly walking the streets of the capitol had added insult to injury, and might well provoke the impatient man into action. There were already rumors that he would begin military maneuvers. Jennie had no choice but to intervene.

In the past, she had always treated Seokjin with cold indifference. The fact that she had approached to initiate conversation must have bewildered him, and he remained aloof and distracted, watching her warily. It made Jennie's task even easier.

With her business concluded, she dismissed him and beckoned to Countess Melissa, who had been nervously watching from a distance.

"I believe things will unfold as you have wished," Jennie told her.

The Countess sighed, her hand fluttering over her chest. "Princess! Why do you have to keep doing such dangerous things?" she asked. She was concerned, but her eyes sparkled. "Seokjin must be going crazy," she laughed. "How dare he challenge the Princess?"

But her laughter faded as she considered her own words.

"I am worried," she added anxiously. "You spoke bravely to him, but we don't know the limits of his ambition, or what he might do to achieve it..."

"It's okay," Jennie assured her. "He can't have it all."

He had taken the bait she had dangled in front of him. By the time he discovered the truth, it would be too late, and Jennie's plans would be too far advanced to stop. The knowledge was a load off her



shoulders.

"Would you like to take a walk, Countess?" she asked.

The Countess smiled, reassured. "It would be my pleasure, Princess."

Together, they headed for the garden, and Jennie deliberately chose less frequented paths so they could stroll without being overheard.

"I want to tell you something," she began, and the Countess's eyes widened. Jennie laughed. "Don't worry, everything will be fine."

The Countess's eyes drifted to Jennie's neck, concealed by the high neck of the gown she wore. No doubt she was remembering what she had seen that morning. Fortunately, they had been alone, and she had seen the bruise on Jennie's delicate skin, with many other frightening marks on her pale neck.

She hadn't pried, choosing instead to attend her princess in silence. And when she dressed her, it was in a modest high-necked dress, covering her all the way to her throat.

"Princess," she finally said.

"Yes, Countess."

"You know that whatever you ask of me, I will do without hesitation..." She trailed off anxiously, clearly worried about Jennie's honor and what it might mean for her safety. The Countess knew what would happen to an impure bride.

No doubt she had also heard from Count Valtein, who had seen Jennie and Liam together at the auction and warned the Countess. Countess Melissa was not always good at verbalizing her thoughts, but now she spoke without hesitation.

"I have heard... I have heard that there are Gypsies who sell potions that can deceive others. It is said that if you consume one, the world around you will change and become difficult to discern. The person's vision will become hazy and dreamlike. If you need one...I will buy it for you before you leave."

Jennie understood what she was offering. If Jennie had lost her virginity to Liam, then Jennie could make Seokjin drink a potion during their first night together, and deceive him by sprinkling a few drops of animal blood to stain the bed. He would never notice.

Despite her own noble status, the Countess wouldn't betray Jennie. She was volunteering to help her lie to the royal family and deceive Seokjin.

"I believe in you, Princess," she said, her eyes moist and reddened from the pain in her heart. "I believe there is always a reason for your decisions. But please share your burdens with me so I can help carry the weight."

The Countess knew Jennie better than anyone, and knew that Jennie often chose to deal with problems personally, forgoing outside help. But however hard she tried to conceal her problems from others, they only seemed to double. As soon as she solved more, more would appear. And Jennie didn't want to risk anyone else. She knew the stakes of the game, and knew its conclusion. How could she reveal her plans to the Countess when they ultimately ended with her own death?

"Thank you," said Jennie softly. If nothing else, she was grateful for the offer. "When the time comes, I will ask for your help."

The day for negotiations had arrived. The morning sky was clear.

As it was only the first round of negotiations, they agreed to send three representatives from Estia and three from the Kurkans to attend. Jennie represented on behalf of the royal family, with Count Valtein and Finance Minister Laurent to assist her.

They arrived first, scanning the empty meeting room before they sat down. The Finance Minister was nervous and trying to hide it; he was already afraid of the Kurkans, and he knew what Jennie was about to attempt. Stiff as statues, they were nearly holding their breaths as the doors open. Jennie stood as a sign of respect.

"I welcome the King of the Kurkans," Jennie greeted them.

"May light fall upon Estia." Liam smiled in response. "It has been a long time, Princess."

The sight of him sent a wave of emotion through Jennie. She felt a tingling nervousness, and though she tried to keep a serene expression on her face, she was sure her expression was giving her away. Count Valtein kept sending her glances, but she kept her eyes on the Kurkan representatives and pretended not to notice.

She hadn't expected Liam to bring Genin and Haban, but there they were, bowing. Strictly speaking, the two could not help Liam in diplomatic matters, but she was grateful for their presence anyway. The fact that she knew them calmed her, and this business would have been more difficult with strangers.

Though Liam had continually disturbed her and shaken her heart since the day she met him, she couldn't help feeling bitter. She knew what the Kurkans thought of these negotiations. No matter what Estia did, they would approve the peace treaty.

Liam seemed to be in a good mood. Despite Jennie's aloofness, he took his seat beside her comfortably.

"I am honored to have the opportunity to personally converse with you, Princess. I have only heard rumors," he said.

This was obviously a lie. They had spoken before.

They had done a great deal more than speak. But at least he was speaking politely and behaving himself, given the formality of the occasion.

"You exaggerate," Jennie replied mildly. "In truth, it is my honor that we can have this discussion."

With the formal greetings complete, the negotiations could begin. Liam immediately seemed determined to get her into trouble.

"So, what did you think?" He asked. It was an ambiguous question, and Jennie hesitated. Liam shook his head. "My question refers to the initiation of our conversation."

She knew he would keep pressing until she have him the answer she wanted.

"It is an excellent beginning," she sighed.

Liam burst out laughing. "Thank you for your hospitality, Princess," he said, with a bright smile, pleased.

Count Valtein and Minister Laurent glanced at each other, perplexed. Choosing to ignore Liam's impudence, Jennie focused her attention on the documents she had prepared.

"First, I want you to read this," she began, handing Liam a document detailing the agenda of the day's negotiations. But he had no intention of reading it.

"My understanding of the language of this continent is poor," he said, setting the papers aside. "Can you explain it to me instead, please?"

She knew he wanted to get straight to the major points of contention and considered niceties like agendas unnecessary. He wanted to conclude the negotiations quickly and then simply chat with her.

"Estia has prepared several concessions," she said, relenting. "First, we will hand over the Kurkans currently in our custody. The royal family currently has thirty Kurkans that we have rescued from slavery. Secondly, we will lend a portion of the western territory to the Kurkans for an indefinite period of time, including the proceeds obtained from the harvests in that region..."

The premise of a negotiation was that each party involved should state their terms and conditions, and then work together to adjust the details and make concessions to resolve any disputes. But as she spoke, Liam just smiled, leaning back in his chair with his arms folded.

He chuckled when she finished. "That's all?"

The conditions she had presented were certainly appealing. But for the King of the Kurkans, who did not fear war, might consider the only appealing offer was to hand the entire country over to him.

Jennie took a deep breath. She knew Liam did not always respond to things that looked like common sense. But she was the princess of a kingdom without power, and she only had one option left.

Setting the documents aside, she met his glinting golden gaze.

"You are aware that I am the fiancée of Seokjin of Oberde?"

Liam's eyes narrowed.

"Certainly," he said, adding in a hard voice. "And when he marries you, Princess, Seokjin of Oberde will have the right to succeed to the throne."

The room was deadly silent. Liam's relaxed good humor had vanished utterly.

"He could succeed immediately," Jennie agreed.

"Are you telling me that you are going to make Seokjin the King of Estia?" He asked. His voice sounded fierce. Very dangerous.

"If you don't sign the peace treaty, yes." Jennie struggled to keep her voice from shaking. "It just might happen."

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## Chapter 61

### Chapter 61 — Take The Royal Princess of Estia

The room fell silent. Liam stared at Jennie. Her breath quickened under his sharp eyes, though she tried her best to remain impassive and ignore the panic tightening in her chest.

According to the Estian laws of succession, women could not inherit the throne. Prince Jongin was currently the only legitimate heir. But if Seokjin became part of the royal family by marrying Jennie...

That was what Jennie had told him, when she had last spoken to him. He could become king if he took her hand, and that was all she needed to say. The greed in his eyes had glowed green. In that moment, his imagination had spread wings and soared away.

But those ambitious dreams would be shattered. There was one crucial condition: their marriage would have to survive for a certain period of time before his position was legitimized. If Jennie died on her first night with Jin, his right to the succession would die before it was born. All his ambitions would be in vain.

She had hidden that portion of the truth from him. Her sweet words had calmed him and distracted him. With that, she had ensured that he would not take action while the negotiations proceeded, though she couldn't deny the possibility that things might get more complicated later on. If that time came, she could not afford to be shy or hesitant. Jennie would need to be as confident as she was now, sitting before Liam.

"Great," Liam finally said. He ran his fingers through his hair, discouraged. "I have to admit, you brought up an unexpected argument."

Haban's mouth was open in surprise, and Genin's eyes looked like they were going to pop out of their sockets. Liam straightened up, no longer lounging against his seat, and smiled at Jennie.

"Fine. I accept your terms and will sign the peace treaty."

Surprise flashed briefly across Jennie's face and her eyes widened. Was it really that easy? But unfortunately for her, Liam was a formidable opponent.

"In addition, I request a demonstration of confidence from Estia," he said.

Instantly, the requests he might make and the countermeasures she might suggest sprang into her mind. But Liam wasn't done.

"I've heard that there's nothing better than a marriage alliance to strengthen the solidarity between two countries."

Jennie blinked. He leaned forward, resting his elbows on the table, his chin propped in his hands.

He looked confident and fierce, his voice seductive.

"I would like to take the royal princess of Estia for my betrothed," he whispered. "What do you think?"

"That's ridiculous!" shouted Finance Minister Laurent, rising from his chair. Count Valtein caught him by his clothes and pulled him back down.

Genin and Haban, standing at attention behind Liam, examined the Finance Minister, and then looked back at Liam, tension clear despite their expressionless eyes. Count Valtein understood what they were thinking, and under the table he kicked the Finance Minister as a warning.

Liam watched the interplay, untroubled. "Isn't this a similar condition to yours? Comparing them, they seem exactly the same. You shouldn't be too surprised by this."

Extending his long fingers, he tapped the table lightly.

"Let's end the discussion at this point for today. I don't think we can talk things over properly under the current conditions. We need time to cool our heads and clear things up. Can you schedule a second meeting for a later date?"

Jennie's whole body tensed.

"I can...do that," she managed.

"Then, I beg you to consider everything carefully, Princess."

Liam rose. Over the course of their discussion, she had forgotten his massive figure, less noticeable while he was seated. Now, his massive form was once again revealed. Liam smiled down at her, looking intently at her for a moment, and then left the room.

As the door closed behind them, Jennie clasped her hands tightly together. Instead of saying goodbye to the King of the Kurkans, Count Valtein and the Finance Minister only exhaled deeply as they watched him leave. It was like coming back to life without the suffocating pressure of his presence.

Jennie was thinking. There was something behind that enigmatic smile Liam had given her as he left, as if he had been hinting something to her. Gathering up all the documents she had diligently prepared, she stood. Count Valtein and Minister Laurent were sprawled over the table soulessly, and looked up in surprise.

"Princess?"

"I'm going somewhere," she said vaguely. She left hurriedly without dispelling their confusion.

But as soon as she opened the chamber door, she was met with a surprise. Liam was waiting for her, and she almost crashed into his chest, stopping abruptly on her toes. He was amused.

"Where shall we go?" He asked cheekily, as assured as if they had agreed on a date. Jennie realized she had a long way to go before she could triumph over this man.

There was only one place in their current location that was both suitable and secluded. She grabbed Liam and led him down the long corridor to the Glory Room. It was filled with paintings and sculptures oriented toward the circular window set in the domed ceiling. A single beam of bright light passed through the window to illuminate the floor. It was meant to symbolize the ambitions of Estia,



the country's hope for unwavering glory and for the light to shine only upon them.

Although Estia's artists worked tirelessly to fill the room with their creations, pouring their hearts into every piece, the sight frustrated Jennie. She was fed up with the empty vanity and colorful ostentation of Estia. The masterpieces might represent something noble, but the same couldn't be true of her nation. The country would have been better served by selling half the masterpieces in the royal palace to fill the empty treasury.

That included the pieces on display in the Glory Room, but the noble families who valued this display of virtue—which only they were allowed to see—would never allow it. So she had to keep her wish to herself.

Liam looked surprised as he entered. But instead of looking at the statues and paintings, he looked up at the ceiling, to the small window. As Jennie approached him, he pushed her gently under the light, making her silver hair glow and her purple eyes sparkle, enchanting. He smiled.

"How pretty," he said, making her face redden at the praise. That he had chosen to direct the unexpected compliment to her instead of the masterpieces surrounding them made it impossible to look him in the eye. But he was as persistent as ever, placing his hands on her shoulders and bending to lay a sweet kiss on her forehead, and then another softly on her cheek.

She tried not to look at his mouth as he drew away. She was surprised he hadn't stolen a kiss from her lips.

Liam let out a sigh. "Did you eat breakfast?"

"...Yes."

"What did you eat?"

"Fruits and vegetables."

"How much?"

"Half a plate of salad and peaches," she replied, though she felt he was questioning her too closely.

He looked quite serious as he asked, which bewildered her.

"How many peaches?" He asked earnestly. It was such a ridiculous question, Jennie just stared at him. He sighed. "All right. Then just come and sit for now."

Taking Jennie's wrist, he walked around the room, searching for a place to sit together. The room had no use other than the vanity of Estia.

"Is there nowhere to sit?" He asked, disappointed. He ended up sitting down in front of a statue, leaning against it and patting his thigh, offering it to Jennie as a seat. She was skeptical.

"We don't have chairs, after all," He shrugged, smiling mischievously.

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## Chapter 62

### Chapter 62 — Countless Thoughts

Jennie thought Liam was taking advantages of the situation, but impulsively she sat down on his thighs anyway. He embraced her politely and firmly, but was careful not to touch her inappropriately. She couldn't help but giggle. He was acting like a real chair.

There was a sense of comfort and stability as she leaned against him, stretching from her chest to her fingertips. It was a peculiar situation, and she had to restrain herself from resting her face on his shoulder.

Liam pulled a palm-sized cookie out of his pocket, wrapped in a paper bag. It was a mix of chocolate chips, fruit, and nuts, lush enough that it seemed like half the cookie would be enough to fill her stomach. He slipped the wrapper off and placed the cookie in Jennie's hand.

"You haven't forgotten your promise, have you?"

Right. The promise to accept whatever he gave her was still valid. Jennie looked at the cookie for a long time before she took a careful bite. Chewing it delicately, she found it pleasantly moist, the sweetness awakening all her dormant senses. She swallowed and pronounced it delicious.

Her mouth watered at the thought of more, but she handed the rest back to Liam, ignoring her pleading taste buds. Instead of taking the cookie, he took her hand and guided it to his own mouth, taking a bite that was just as small as hers.

"Tastes good," he said. "Why don't you eat more?"

"Because I'm full," she replied, and quickly changed the subject. She didn't want him to ask her to eat more. "Please tell me about the queen."

When it seemed that changing the subject wouldn't be enough and he would complain, she added, "How did you know she was a Gypsy?"

She waited for him to answer her question, but however long she waited, not a word came out of his mouth. She was about to press him some more when suddenly he chuckled and moved Jennie's hand, still clutching the cookie in her fingers, back to her lips.

He knew she was trying to stop him from making her eat more. He wasn't easily fooled.

"I'll tell you as soon as you finish eating," he said. Sweetness flashed in his eyes as he smiled, and looking up at them, she agreed and bit slowly into the cookie once more.

Her taste buds were happy to receive the rich sugary flavor, the soft texture of the cookie, the robust crunch of the nuts and the melting chocolate, blending with the pieces of fruit. She felt euphoric with the sensations, but she still regretted it. She shouldn't have taken that first bite, it would have been much easier to control her impulses if she hadn't tasted it. Now the cookie was implanted in her mind. It was harassing her with its presence.

But even though she knew she shouldn't eat it, she couldn't stop herself. The impulsive desire was unfamiliar, but the craving made her devour more and more until it was gone. She was embarrassed.

She had been lying. She had never been full.

Liam reached out and gently grazed the corners of her lips, brushing the cookie crumbs away.

Reflexively, she squeezed the wrapper. She had soiled herself, eating so hastily.

She was embarrassed. She must have looked very rude, forgoing all etiquette to enjoy a snack.

Unfortunately, this seemed like a recurring pattern.

She didn't know why, but every time she was with Liam her usually miniscule appetite increased dramatically. She felt guilty for her lack of self control.

Regretting it, she fiddled with the cookie wrapper until Liam took it

from her and crumpled it up.

And all she could think as she watched was that she yearned for more cookies...

Jennie realized what she was thinking and chided herself harshly. When she had looked in the mirror last night, she had gained weight. Now, since she had eaten the cookie, she would starve herself the rest of the day to be sure she wouldn't gain any more. Perhaps she should consider a smaller breakfast tomorrow morning, too.

"I finished the cookie," she said. "Now, will you answer my questions?"

"Well, okay," Liam replied reluctantly. Jennie gave him a sharp look and he sighed. "Well, there's a Kurkan who knows sorcery. I found out the Queen is a gypsy with his help."

"Sorcery... So that Kurkan is also a Gypsy?"

"Yes. Tomari blood flows within him."

Surprised, Jennie took a deep breath. Unlike the Kurkans, whose savage heritage was visible at a glance, gypsies' features were more subtle and lacked any animal quality. The two groups had always been antagonistic to each other. Even now the gypsies were fleeing from the Kurkans' persecution.

It was clear that there was more that Liam hadn't told her, aside from the fact that the two groups were somehow related. Jennie hesitated.

"Why...why didn't you tell me sooner?" She asked.

"I've been busy."

That wasn't an excuse. Jennie had been busy, too, with all the problems cropping up around her.

"Besides," Liam added, "There was no reason to tell you, right? You'll put Seokjin on the throne if I allow you to bend me, princess. I have to keep some secrets."

Jennie kept her mouth shut. She could feel his intense gaze on her, and it felt strange to pretend to ignore it, since their faces were only inches apart. He wasn't shy about examining her, his deep, dark pupils seeming to peer inside her.

"I don't understand you," he said.

She closed her eyes, drawing a deep breath. She had wondered what Liam would have done, if he were in her situation. Now, she knew. The moment the slightest opportunity presented itself, he would cut the shackles from his ankles without a moment's hesitation. And he would not flee far. He would claim vengeance on those that had subdued and mistreated him. It was not difficult to imagine Liam stained with the blood of her enemies.

Her efforts seemed insignificant in comparison. He wouldn't understand her. He wouldn't comprehend her desire.

"I can't...do it," she whispered. His eyes narrowed, and she stopped trying to avoid them. She met his gaze. "Securing the peace treaty is my last duty to Estia."

As much as she wanted to die, she didn't want to end her life irresponsibly. People who were precious to her would live on after her death. She wanted to build a solid foundation for them.

"Oh." Liam sighed deeply and ran a hand over her face. "I'm in trouble..."

She didn't understand. She wanted to ask what she meant, but then Liam smiled at her.

"Your complaint almost makes me want to accept the agreement," she said quietly. She blinked, surprised at the affection in his musical voice. Her cheeks flushed, and she said quickly,

"Making an important decision just because of something like that..."

"It's not the only reason." He moved closer to her, and she allowed their noses to touch as he whispered, "I'm serious."

Jennie's eyes grew very wide. His usual teasing, mischievous attitude

had vanished, and his eyes were dark and magnetic.

"Wouldn't you rather become a Kurkan's wife than marry Seokjin?"

Her lips parted automatically to answer, but she couldn't speak. This was something she had to think about carefully.

The Queen of the Kurkans...

Though Liam had suggested this in their negotiation, she had assumed he was just teasing her. She had never thought that he was truly offering her that position. So many thoughts whirled in her mind, she felt as if there were a storm raging inside her.

Was he being honest? There was no reason to trust his words. At most, they had a sexual relationship. Superficial, a relationship where they only shared their bodies. Therefore, if their bodies changed, so would their connection.

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## Chapter 63

### Chapter 63 — Bride Kidnapping

Looking into his eyes, Jennie couldn't help remembering their first meeting, which was a deliberate meeting Liam had disguised as a coincidence. It felt as if it had happened yesterday, Liam in her cloak, and she in her disguise.

The memory did not alleviate her doubts.

It seemed the Kurkans had relationships with Estian dignitaries. It wouldn't be strange if their King had done something to compromise Jennie, who was a key figure in Estian society. She knew how easy it would be for Liam to persuade her, and possibly steal Estia's most sensitive information. Simple reason warned her that she should turn away from him and his lies, but her heart didn't want to believe that.

When she realized she was still doubting after listing twenty-nine different reasons why she shouldn't trust him, she could only come to one conclusion.

Her ability to be objective had been compromised. When it came to Liam, she could no longer think properly.

He waited silently for her response while Jennie wrestled with her thoughts.

"It's never easy," he said finally, after a prolonged silence. Leaning forward, he kissed her slowly, softly.

It was a simple and loving kiss, without the demand of lust, and he drew back to look into her eyes.

"What do you want to do after the peace treaty?"

She did not answer.

"Do you still want to die?"

She lowered her gaze.



"Are you dying for your convenience?" She said nothing. "You're dying for your own convenience?"

She couldn't easily answer any of his questions. She felt adrift from his questions and the feelings he provoked. Her eyes fell on the circle on the floor, the light streaming through the window overhead. It looked like a luminous rope she could climb to escape this suffocating room. She could just imagine a cool breeze blowing all her problems away once she escaped.

A familiar impulse surged within her, but this time, it wouldn't go away. It wouldn't be ignored. It spread through her body.

The man whose lap she was sitting in had ruined everything. Even her most irrevocable decision, the one she had sworn she would never change, had been affected by his influence. The hard shell inside her shattered, because of him. Liam had destroyed her plans and left everything unstable and dangerous.

She was hesitant and choked with remorse.

"I don't want to die," she whispered. Her throat was tight. She felt as if that simple sentence had torn her to pieces and cut her insides.

Liam's golden eyes remained fixed on her. He didn't press her, he was just paying attention to her as she trembled in his arms. She was shattered inside.

"I want to live."

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Since their creation, the Kurkans were an unnatural race. They were born in defiance of natural law and filled with imperfections. They could only live to adulthood and have offspring after performing certain rituals. If they were not allowed to celebrate their initiation rites, then they could not even grow old, and were trapped in the space between adolescence and adulthood forever.

Kurkans rescued from slavery were sent back to the desert for their initiations. They were reborn as warriors and then allowed to perform their tasks and live in their towns. Intending to bid them

farewell, Liam went to the plains outside the capitol, where the wind blew through the tall, thick grass.

Unlike the Kurkans who had undergone their rituals, these Kurkans were much smaller, dressed in robes with backpacks on their shoulders. Looking at Liam, they waited respectfully for him to address them.

"May the sandstorms blow away from your path," he told them, and they bowed their heads in thanks.

A woman at the front of the group spoke carefully.

"We thought our king had abandoned us."

Liam chuckled.

"I, too, was abandoned in the past." His eyes turned cold as he spoke, remembering his predecessor. "I rose from the same depths you all once inhabited.

Genin and Haban watched Liam calmly, memories of the past flashing vividly through their minds. When he had decided to become their new king and asked for their help, he swore he would never be like his predecessor.

Now he spread his hands.

"The time has come," he declared. "You still have a long way to go."

One by one, he said goodbye to each of the Kurkans. As he was doing so, the Kurkan who had served Jennie at the auction house approached Haban.

"Excuse me," he began. "But that woman who saved us. Do you happen to know where she lives, and if she is single?"

Haban was startled by the bold question and froze as if he had been struck by lightning, but the young man continued, ignoring his reaction.

"If she's single, can I come kidnap her later? I think I fell in love at

first sight. Of course, I'll ask her first if she agrees to being captured into marriage..."

Genin clapped her hand over his mouth, forcibly silencing him. The young man was surprised and confused, but Liam, who had noticed the scene, smiled.

"Lushan," he called calmly.

The young man pushed Genin's hand away from his mouth and glanced between her and Haban before he responded.

"Yes, my king."

Liam stared at him. Silently. Gradually, Lushan's face grew rigid, and he averted his gaze, avoiding Liam's golden eyes. Liam didn't have to speak. The pressure of his eyes was sufficient to make the younger man begin to tremble.

"I sincerely hope you won't carry out any of those plans," Liam said.

"...I'm sorry." Lushan bowed deeply as Haban and Genin looked on with pity. But ignorance was considered a sin. Lushan was lucky that things had ended this way. The Kurkans finished their farewells and left for the desert, and Liam watched their backs as they moved through the eulalia.

### **(PS. Eulalia: it is a herbaceous plant)**

His hair fluttered in the cool breeze, making him think of the hot sun and golden sands of his home. He missed many things about that place. But he couldn't go back yet. There were still many things to do. Haban and Genin followed behind him as he walked away, conversing,

"I think Seokjin of Oberde has gone crazy."

"The princess only mentioned that he might succeed, and he acts as if he's already on the throne."

Liam would be furious if Seokjin married the royal princess and obtained the right to the throne. Jin only had control over the

borders because of his military might. But if he gained the power of the royal family through marriage, that would change the whole story. From there he would only need to secure financial resources and the support of the nobles in favor of the princess, and then he would become a true threat to the crown prince's position.

At first, Seokjin had wanted the princess simply to possess a beautiful and honorable wife. But with her hints about the throne, Jennie had fanned the embers of his greed, and they were beginning to smolder.

"This country is a mess," Haban grumbled, "And the princess is always sacrificing for it..."

Liam smiled. "There will always be trouble wherever Gypsies are found," he said.

"And what about the Queen?" Genin interjected.

"Well, that worries me."

"If the Queen is a Gypsy, isn't the palace in danger?" Haban asked gravely.

"It's more than dangerous. The whole palace is in her hands."

Her spells weren't omnipotent. They were hard work to maintain and certain conditions had to be fulfilled. But while casting a spell was difficult, the longer it remained active, the more powerful it became and the harder it was to break. The queen had been at the palace for a long time. The place would be riddled with her spells.

"She could have bewitched the king as well," Liam said.

"She must have cast an ancient spell. Brainwashing, right?"

"Maybe. He was the first person she approached."

It must have taken a lot of effort to gain the king's love and convince him to banish the previous queen.

When Liam had last seen the king at the banquet lunch, he definitely had not been in normal condition. The brainwashing must have

progressed even further by now. The queen's influence might have gone so far that the king could no longer distinguish his own thoughts from her commands. But they couldn't be sure how far the queen had gotten. They just knew she wouldn't have stopped with a simple spell.

Liam frowned.

"Call Morga," he ordered.

Genin glanced at Haban, her face darkening. She didn't like this idea.

"If we call Morga," Haban said, making a last effort to persuade Liam against it, "We might lose track of the Tomaris we're already following."

Liam shook his head. "There's no way around it. This matter is far more urgent."

Haban and Genin looked at each other grimly, but Liam had fixed his gaze on the horizon, in the direction of the palace of Estia, though it was too far away to be seen. His lips curved in a smile. He could hear Jennie's small, wavering whisper in his mind, warming the depths of his heart.

— *I want to live.*

Liam was desperate to fulfill her desires.

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## Chapter 64

### Chapter 64 — Unexpected Visitor

Jennie felt as if she were walking in a dream. Every time she remembered her conversation with Liam in the Glory Room, her heart raced. The shadow of melancholy that had always lain over her had evaporated.

Nothing was definite yet, but a faint hope had grown inside her, assuring her that somehow everything would work out. She would never have felt this optimism by herself.

She wasn't permitted to enjoy this feeling for long. An unexpected visitor burst into her office, demanding her attention without even seeking an appointment.

"I haven't seen your face lately, Jennie."

Jennie looked up from the documents she was reviewing.

"Crown Prince," she said quietly.

The royal palace maids following him were desperate, trying to dissuade Jongin, but had been unsuccessful. Jennie set her quill aside.

"Bring me some tea," she ordered. The tea was an excuse for the maids to stay away and not get caught up in anything unpleasant, like last time. Jongin sat down on the couch in front of desk, arrogantly, with his legs outstretched. His hair had the same silvery shade as hers, glowing softly like the moon. Jennie looked at him with obvious disinterest.

"Why are you looking at me like that?" Jongin asked sharply.

Jennie bit her lip, holding back displeasure. "Hurry up and tell me what you want."

"I'm going to hunt with the wild beasts," he said. "I want you to come too."

He wasn't just informing her, he was giving her an order. The hand resting on her desk trembled, and she clenched it into a fist. Jongin had already ruined the luncheon, now what was he planning?

She ignored the way his lips curved. "We barely had our first negotiation meeting. Please, can't you just sit still until the negotiations are completely over?"

Jennie laughed. "You've gotten more arrogant!"

He got up from the couch and slowly approached Jennie, placing his hands on her desk. She eyed him warily, but he smiled broadly.

"Seems like something's been going on lately," he whispered. "You've been accepting everything the Kurkans want." His pale fingers gently brushed over Jennie's hair, as if he were tidying it. "If you like that beast so much, what would you think if we had him sleep in the stable?"

His hand suddenly tightened painfully in her hair.

"It would be exciting to see him among the horses," he teased.

"If that were to happen, surely the nobles would admire Estia's hospitality." Jennie said without altering her expression. She expected him to lift his hand and slap her, but the blow never came. He just laughed.

"Bring a handkerchief on the day of the hunt," he told her.

And that was that. Before the maids could even bring the tea, Jongin was gone. Jennie took up her quill again, and the ink at its tip fell like tears, blotting the sheet of paper before her. The darkness fell like a shadow over her body.

She felt terrible.

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A haunting voice echoed behind a closed door. The sounds within were unmistakable, enough to make anyone's ears burn, but Jongin, sitting on a nearby sofa, was indifferent. His face only reflected

incredible boredom. The maids standing behind Jongin did their best to keep their faces equally expressionless, and silently refilled his glass every time he emptied it.

A final moan issued from behind the closed door.

After a few moments, the door opened, and Cerdina stepped out of the doorway, pushing her sweaty hair aside. Her eyes widened.

"Jongin?"

A thick scent accompanied her out the door, sweet, heavy, and sickening. When Jongin frowned at her, she only smiled softly and pushed the door open wider to reveal the scene behind her.

The King was inside, lying naked and unashamed on the bed, looking dreamily at the ceiling. His eyes were unfocused, devoid of spirit. They looked like the eyes of a doll.

Cerdina rearranged her mussed dress to better hide her figure, still smiling.

"I don't know if it's a side effect of the spell, but it looks like it will take some time." Barefoot, she walked over to Jongin and sat beside him, her voice affectionate. "Have you been waiting long? Why didn't you come in?"

Jongin snorted. "I know exactly what you're doing. How could I come in?"

"Well, this is much better than behaving like a mother who wastes her son's precious time," she said, sipping from a glass the maids handed her.

Jongin's gaze unconsciously shifted to the King, who was still lying in silence. Seeing the King's silver hair, he started to think. It was said that blood cannot be deceived, and the two men were very much alike.

Jongin had heard that when the King was younger, he had been a very handsome man, as handsome as his son.



Cerdina saw Jongin looking at the King and burst out laughing. Jongin quickly averted his eyes, too late.

"You want me to do the same with Jennie, a lifeless doll?" she asked, smiling coldly. Her soft voice was enticing.

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## Chapter 65

### Chapter 65 — Hunting With The Barbarians

"That's not necessary."

"All right, Jongin." She gently patted his head.

"Good decision. If I did, things would get coring, right?" He didn't respond, so she continued, "Wait a little longer and it will all fall into your hands. It'll be much better than a puppet like that man. Don't be too impatient."

She looked at him affectionately, but he said nothing. Leaning over, she ran a hand through his hair.

"It will all be yours," she whispered. "Jennie, this country...this continent..."

Her ambition could not be satisfied with this small kingdom alone. Cerdina was convinced she would achieve everything her heart desired.

"Regarding the hunt, I've already heard about it." She smiled slightly. She was aware of the real reason for Jongin visit. "I was a bit surprised at first, but what does it matter, if the beasts were watching me anyway. Better to meet them at a place I've prepared."

She supported Jongin's decision. It had been a timely thing to do. Finally, he spoke.

"Even if I'm putting you in danger?" His voice was strained, and he clenched his fists, his veins bulging under his pale skin. "Will you support me, too?"

Cerdina's eyes widened, but quickly she relaxed her face.

"Of course, Jongin. I'm sure you have your reasons. If you needed it, I would provide you with my corpse. Anything you want. I'll make sure you keep the crown, my dear son."

Her voice was loving, cloying, insensate. Listening to her left a bitter taste in his mouth.

'You've gone too far already,' he thought.

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It looked like it would rain any moment. The cloudy sky was totally unsuitable for a hunt, but that didn't deter those gathering to participate in it. After all, the hunt was just an excuse.

Jennie looked down to survey her surroundings.

Tents were spread throughout the forest and fires burned, a convenient formation of barracks. The hunters and attendants moved in perfect order, preparing for the hunt, and chefs were standing by, ready to receive whatever animals the hunters provided.

Although more than a hundred people had gathered, only a few were participating directly in the hunt. The King of Estia did not come, pleading illness. The queen, the prince, the princess, and the King of the Kurkans would be the only royalty present.

Countess Melissa stood beside Jennie with a nervous expression. Baroness Cinael was usually among Jennie's followers and liked to participate in these kinds of activities, but today she was nowhere to be seen. Jennie made her way slowly to the place where the hawks were caged. She would have to investigate the matter further when the hunt was over.

In a large cage, a hawk flapped its wings, and she smiled. It was her bird, and it looked as if the bird recognized her.

Slipping on her gloves, she fed it bits of raw chicken.

She loved that it looked so brave and graceful, even when it was just eating. It looked as if the hawk would easily catch a rabbit or a pigeon, but Jennie's hawk wasn't very good at hunting. She had never trained it. She just rewarded it with delicious food, even though all it knew to do was circle in the air, a simple life with peaceful pleasures.

Cerdina's hawk was more astute. It hunted well, and when it couldn't

catch its prey directly, it would chase it toward the hunters to catch it instead. All the other nobles coveted Cerdina's falcon, but Jennie did not. She had never been interested in hunting.

Like her falcon, she only wanted to enjoy the forest in her own way.

But Jennie's hawk stopped pecking and seemed to forget the raw chicken she had given it, hesitating.

The other creatures present all did the same, the horses and hunting dogs lifting their heads to look in the same direction at once.

The hunting dogs had been barking, but now they were silent, their tails down and wagging. The horses stopped chewing their carrots and backed away, abandoning their food just as Jennie's hawk had done. Their instinctive fear of a top predator overwhelmed them.

The gazes of the people naturally followed the eyes of their animals, and the once noisy forest became silent.

The animals sensed the presence of the King of the Kurkans, Liam.

Jennie realized that Liam was walking calmly toward her, somehow looking more imposing than usual. He wore hunting clothes, and it was strange to see him carrying a quiver and a sword at his waist, but they suited him well.

Behind him came the Kurkans he had chosen to accompany him on the hunt. There were five in all, including Haban and Genin, but there was one in particular that she had never seen before. A male Kurkan with long hair tied back, brushing his waist, and a tattoo on his skin that extended from the edge of his eye to his cheek. His eyes were long and thin, and his lips curved slightly in a smile.

Before Liam reached Jennie, another figure appeared to greet him. Jongin had been checking his horse, but moved to intercept, and the two men stared silently at each other for a moment. Jongin was the first to speak.

"Thank you for agreeing to hunt with us today, sir," he said.

Cerdina stepped out of a tent, dressed in a simple and comfortable

dress very similar to Jennie's. She looked around with sleepy eyes, but composed herself gracefully at the sight of Liam and approached the king.

"Long time no see," she said. "How have you been?"

The Kurkans stared at her as if she were a particularly interesting creature, intimidating stares that didn't make Cerdina hesitate in the least. She only smiled kindly, and Liam smiled back.

"Thanks to Estia's hospitality, my stay has been very comfortable."

Though the luncheon he had attended had been ruined, no one mentioned that. Everyone smiled and talked as if nothing had happened. In society, yesterday's enemy could easily become a friend today. But no matter how often such situations occurred, it was always strange to witness them.

Jennie was the last to approach. She had planned to greet him simply and turn away immediately, but she doubted Liam would allow it. As she approached, the Kurkans shifted their eyes to her, and Liam looked at her calmly, smiling.

"Princess." Unconcerned as always with others around him, he spoke softly. "Would you like a particular animal? I'll catch it for you."

She was about to respond, but someone else spoke first.

"My sister will hunt for herself." Jongin grabbed her tightly by the wrist and pulled her back, putting her behind him. "You don't have to do anything for her, sir."

Liam's attention was not on Jongin. His eyes were focused on Jennie's wrist, glaring at the harsh grip that held her. Slowly, dangerously, his eyes shifted to Jongin's face.

"Crown Prince, what are you so afraid of?" His lips curved in an empty smile, and his eyes glittered, cold and ominous. His voice was calm, but piercing, as he challenged the prince. "Do you think I'm going to capture and marry the princess right now?"

Anyone listening could tell he was trying to provoke the Prince.

Jongin took a deep breath, trying to contain his irritation.

"Why should I be afraid?" He retorted. He could keep a smile on his face even when he was angry.

"You have come to Estia personally, with the intent to sign a peace treaty. I assume you won't do anything to start a war." His voice was as chilly as the winter wind. "You should not covet what another possesses."

Liam considered these words, and then gave a short laugh. Jennie glanced at Cerdina. The queen looked happy. Normally, she would be provoked by any display of thoughtlessness or disrespect to her precious son, so it struck Jennie as strange. Uneasy, she kept an eye on the Queen.

Liam also glanced at Cerdina, smiling.

"Really, now...I think this is going to be a fun hunt," he said. His golden eyes glinted, sly and enigmatic.

"I can't wait for it to start," Jongin replied, and Liam turned away. Jongin watched Liam's back before he turned away as well, dragging Jennie back to his camp. He released her there, continuing his preparations for the hunt, testing his bowstring and examining his horse's saddle. He didn't look at her until he finished.

"Jennie, the handkerchief," he ordered.

Silently, she offered him the handkerchief she had brought. It was not a significant item, just something she had found by chance around the palace, and though Jongin must have known this, he accepted it without protest. He didn't care where it came from, the important thing was that she was giving it to him.

"Do you want a deer's horn?" he asked, tying the handkerchief around his wrist. "Or a fox tail?"

She knew her brother would keep bothering her until she chose something, so she answered automatically, without enthusiasm.

"I want the fur of a fox," she said.

But the first animal that came to mind was not a fox, but a wolf. The beast that reminded her of Liam.

Immediately, she shook the thought away.

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## Chapter 66

### Chapter 66 — Look At Me, Jennie

Jongin was pleased by her submission, though not by her attitude.

"As you like, sister." He smiled. "You wait here. I'll get you the biggest one."

He left, leading the attendants and horses into the woods. As soon as she was sure he was gone, Jennie looked around. The Kurkans were also on horseback, ready to leave. She noticed they carried no riding crops; they knew how to handle horses without such tools. The most unruly hunting dogs had intentionally been given to the Kurkans, but they did not need to persuade them with food or yell at them to make them obey. As the hunters watched with amazement, the unruly dogs obeyed the slightest whistle and pat, as if they had been perfectly trained from the beginning.

The attendants watching were astonished and frightened by the sight. But they knew that the Kurkans' control was based on their kinship with beasts. Their outward appearance was human, but the Kurkans were a completely different people.

Jennie had been watching with everyone else, and when she turned, her eyes met those of Liam. She quickly averted them, returning to the barracks assigned to her rather than watching him leave.

She told the other ladies to relax in another tent opposite, while she rested alone. She had wanted a break before she went hunting with the falcons, but Cerdina had called for her. It had been a long time since they had been alone together. The mere thought of having to endure that woman once again instantly drained Jennie's energy.

Alone in her tent, she pulled a handkerchief from her breast. It was a different handkerchief than the one she had given Jongin. This one was made in Estia, pure white and embroidered with gold thread in each corner. She cherished it and often carried it with her, but today she brought it to give to Liam.



But in spite of her intentions, she had missed her opportunity. She had been put off by the stares following her, watching her every action. Jennie gripped the handkerchief in her hands, filled with regret.

I'll give it to him, no matter who sees us, she thought. For the first time she wanted to act without having to worry about what others would say, though she knew better than anyone else why she couldn't.

Jennie stopped. Looking at the handkerchief, the frustration and unhappiness welled up in her and she wanted to throw it away, tear it to pieces. But no matter how upset she was, she was the princess. She put the handkerchief away.

".....!"

Someone suddenly hugged her from behind, startling her so much she couldn't even scream. Her eyes widened and her breath sped as the person spun her around with a large, firm hand. One arm held her around the waist as he bent his face close, eager and impatient to kiss her.

She accepted this kiss unconsciously, almost reflexively, stumbling backward over something and falling onto a long couch. Both her hands were pinned by the much stronger hands of her aggressor and golden eyes looked at her, full of satisfaction.

"Hi." Liam smiled, bending until they were nearly nose to nose. "Are you surprised?"

He licked her flushed cheek and Jennie let out a gasp. Her heart was beating so wildly, it seemed about to burst from her breast any moment. She was surprised, but another impulse seized her as well, and she had to bite her lip to keep from saying anything dangerous.

"You have something for me, don't you?" he asked. He was goading her to get her to give him what she had brought for him. Maybe the Gypsies weren't the only ones with tricks and spells up their sleeves.

Sometimes it seemed Liam could read minds.

"Yes," she confessed, low. "I have something for you."

She tried to reach for the handkerchief hidden in her breast, but Liam wouldn't let go of her, and she had to give up, imploring him to let her go with her eyes.

He only smiled.

"Let me grab it."

He easily held both her wrists in one hand. Jennie had always been aware of how big his hands were, but in this situation the difference was even more shocking. His other hand moved to freely caress her skin, his leather glove sliding smoothly over her neck and down to her chest.

"I think you hid it well.... here..."

"No!" Jennie exclaimed. "Don't, let go of me...!"

Liam seemed to enjoy it when she made a scene. He kissed her face and neck, intoxicating her senses. Resisting, Jennie managed to push him away and pull out the handkerchief herself, but realized immediately that the skirt of her dress had ridden up to her thighs.

Liam kissed her knee loudly, looking shamelessly down at her thighs and grabbing them. His touch felt strange because of the gloves, and Jennie shuddered at the feeling of leather.

"What a waste," Liam complained. "I don't have much time."

If he had time, who knew what the hell he would do.

Jennie quickly closed her legs, and Liam stood up, still smiling. The couch creaked under his shifting weight, slightly increased today because of the weight of the sword. His bow and quiver were probably strapped to his horse, but he kept his sword with him. Although she had never seen him handle his sword before, he carried it easily, with effortless skill.

Liam tied the handkerchief to the hilt of his sword.

Everyone would wonder where he had gotten it as soon as they saw it, and Jennie would have stopped him, but he asked her a question.

"What kind of beast would you like me to capture?"

He intended to bring her prey after the hunt. Well, he had intended to do that from the beginning; people were going to talk regardless of whether she surrendered her handkerchief or not. And no matter what, there would always be someone gossiping about them...

Jennie sunk deep into her thoughts and was surprised when she realized they were starting to sound quite belligerent. It was as if she were slowly turning into Liam.

"I don't know what Jongin was thinking when he invited you," she said, changing the subject.

"I suppose he is trying to determine the hierarchy,"

Liam replied, watching her as she sat down on the couch. "I'll compete with confidence, though the queen and prince may have their tricks."

'Just that?' Jennie couldn't believe it, but Liam was calm.

"It's normal to go a little crazy when you fall in love," he said.

She didn't understand why he mentioned love out of nowhere. Liam tilted his head.

"Look at me, Jennie." His eyes narrowed, a slight smile on his lips.

"I'm being pretty stupid myself."

She looked at him, stunned. His words echoed in her head, though he looked unperturbed, as if he hadn't said anything strange. Her eyes grew wider and wider as the words sunk in, her thoughts swirling, and she put a startled hand to her mouth.

What had she just heard?

As she sat there without any idea what to do, Liam took her hand and placed five cookies in it, moderate-sized with chunks of palm dates.

"I'll be a while with the Crown Prince, so eat all of these in the meantime," he said, pressing a cookie to her lips. She chewed and swallowed reflexively. She tasted the sweetness of the palm dates, but swallowed too quickly to fully absorb the flavors.

The cookies were not her biggest concern. Jennie got up from the couch.

"Just now," she began, and stopped. She tried to get the words out, but couldn't stop stuttering. "Just now, what you told me..."

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## Chapter 67

### Chapter 67 — Have You Gained Weight?

Liam just looked at Jennie's flushed face. He always behaved the same way. He could have spoken normally, but he refused to do so unless she asked first. And once again, she had no choice to insist, to make him clarify what he had just said.

"What...what did you mean?" she asked, and then closed her eyes tightly, embarrassed. The question sounded so stupid, she should have expressed herself more elegantly, more gracefully. Her face was so hot she could feel the blood rising to the tips of her ears.

And even after a few moments, Liam still did not respond. She opened her eyes slowly to find him staring at her, unblinking, as if he were looking at the most appetizing prey in the land.

"You're very pretty," he murmured.

Jennie shuddered. If she acted any cuter, he was going to devour her whole, chewing her to the bone.

She inhaled deeply and his arms tightened around her, his hands beginning to caress her. He bit her, small bites, occasionally sucking on her sensitive skin, and Jennie remained dazed, clutching the cookies in her hand.

There was a faint whistling sound in the distance. Liam stopped, frowning. "Now I really have to go," he sighed. "Don't be surprised if Morga shows up."

Jennie snapped out of her daze. It was the first time she had heard that name, but she supposed Liam must be referring to the long-haired Kurkan man she had seen earlier.

"He can cast spells. He's pretty good. His personality is a little strange, but..." Liam paused. "Anyway, I'm going to go." He lifted her up and gave her a quick kiss, smiling mischievously. "I'll be sure to pay you back for your handkerchief. Wait for that moment."

Jennie only had time to blink before he disappeared as quickly as he had appeared. Left behind and dismayed, she sat down on the couch. The cookies in her hand fell to the floor.

After many long moments, a sigh escaped her. It all seemed unreal, as if a huge wave had rushed over her and swept her away. She laid the back of her hand against her cheeks and realized that she was still heated. Jennie drew several deep breaths, inhaling and exhaling.

Her mind was filled with strange thoughts. She was trying to contain her heart, but the feelings inside her were roaring louder and louder, churning like a fresh-caught fish, struggling to escape. They were overwhelming. She couldn't control them. She kept hearing Liam's words.

Suddenly, a voice spoke from outside.

"Princess." Countess Melissa spoke, and Jennie felt as if ice water had been poured over her. Her turmoil subsided. She had to go hawk hunting with Cerdina, and she had forgotten all about it.

The storm that Liam had raised in her calmed.

Cerdina's shadow loomed over her, and, feeling as if she were trapped in a nightmare, Jennie answered.

"I'm coming out," she said, stepping out of the tent.

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Cerdina had finished her preparations and was already feeding her hawk. The bird dug its claws into her thick gloves as it ate the one piece of meat she offered. Cerdina only gave it one bite because the hawk wouldn't hunt as effectively if it was full.

"Welcome, Jennie."

Jennie pulled on a pair of leather gloves that covered her forearms and opened the cage containing her own falcon. Releasing the rope that bound its leg, she let it fly, and the hunters hurried to follow. The hawk wore a rattle that made it easy to follow.

Though they had begun at the same time, Cerdina's hawk was already considerably beyond Jennie's. Jennie bit her lip as she watched her hawk in the air.

Cerdina looked at Jennie and smiled to herself. "Shall we go too?"

Leading the other ladies, Cerdina moved ahead and Jennie followed close behind. If they walked slowly enough, the hunters would find the hawks and their prey on their own and return. The forest was filled with the sound of birdsong, despite the cold.

Adjusting the hem of her dress, Jennie watched Cerdina intently. Since Cerdina was a Gypsy, could she use sorcery? Jennie had heard that very few Gypsies could, but Liam wouldn't have brought a Kurkan capable of casting spells if he hadn't had good reason. It could make the situation even more complicated, but Jennie had managed to overcome most of the challenges so far...

She shifted her attention to the ladies with Cerdina. They were from noble families of high society, and they followed the queen like expressionless shadows.

Jennie guessed that Cerdina had not been blessed with a tight circle of friends. The ladies would stay by her side to some extent, but Cerdina must have discovered their weaknesses somehow. Jennie had searched tirelessly for a weakness in Cerdina herself, but unfortunately discovered none. The queen must have formidable skills to conceal them so well. But if there was sorcery involved...

Things Jennie had wondered about began to click together. The stubborn King of Estia had declined greatly after crowning Cerdina his queen. Was it really old age that clouded his judgment?

Jennie was lost in thought when Cerdina stopped walking and turned her gaze on Jennie, smiling in the sweetest way...

"What are you thinking?" Cerdina asked. "We're finally together after so long, and we don't even talk."

"I'm sorry..."

"Why are you apologizing? After all, you've been busy with

negotiations these days," Cerdina said, seemingly embarrassed. "Please remember that you don't have to exert yourself. The peace treaty is not so essential to the future of Estia."

Jennie kept quiet. She knew Cerdina had more to say.

"In fact, I think it was a ridiculous endeavor from the beginning. How can we relate to such beasts?" Cerdina's attractive face began to twist, her expression becoming far less pleasant. Her pleasant facade was replaced by her true nature, cold and stern. "Those vulgar things..."

Jennie swallowed. She felt her throat constrict, and her mouth was suddenly very dry. Cerdina's words had cleared up the doubts she had felt since the luncheon. Cerdina hadn't wanted to negotiate from the beginning. But why? Jennie couldn't understand it, knowing that Jongin might succeed the throne. If they had a peace treaty, they could curb Seokjin's influence...

"But, Jennie..." Cerdina spoke once more, examining Jennie closely. "Have you gained weight?"

She frowned, and under the stinging comment, Jennie felt as if someone was pressing down on her chest. Unconsciously, she clutched her dress.

"As busy as you are, you shouldn't neglect something so basic, don't you think?" Cerdina's delicate hand caressed Jennie's pale cheek. Although it looked like an affectionate gesture, Jennie trembled under the touch. "I hope you won't disappoint me."

Every time Jennie stood before the queen, she felt like a fragile little girl. As if all her convictions and experiences evaporated, and she became a helpless child again who could do nothing but tremble in fear. Jennie's voice came out tremulous and helpless.

"I'll be careful."

"Remember to call me mother when you talk to me."

"All right. Mother."

"Yes. You're very kind," Cerdina smiled. She could see the fear in



Jennie's eyes. "So docile. I have taught my children well, don't you think?"

Jennie nodded quickly, and Cerdina smiled broadly.

"The crown prince!" An attendant shouted, hurrying toward them, frantic and sweating.

"Jongin? What happened to him?" Cerdina's eyes immediately narrowed and her calm appearance vanished, her face grave and fierce. The swift shift unsettled the attendant.

"His Highness was wounded."

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In the hierarchy of the Kurkans, each tribe would have its own chief, and above the chiefs, was the king. Morga, the chief of the tribe that carried the blood of the serpent, had a talent for sorcery.

Like the Gypsies, only a few Kurkans had the ability to master sorcery. And because of this gift, Morga had become powerful, and rose to the top of the hierarchy. He was one of the few Kurkans with such a great ability and good looks. But his reputation was one of the worst among his people, and only his power made up for his terrible personality.

"Mars will be out this day," he said coldly. "Bad luck looms over us and fills the air with violence and aggression. Impatient, easily angered," he warned. "Aries must be careful." Turning to his companion, he asked, "are you Aries?"

"No."

"Then what constellation were you born under?"

"I don't know."

Morga clicked his tongue at the answer, dissatisfied. "That's not good, Haban, not good at all. You should be careful where you walk."

At that moment, Haban stumbled over the protruding root of a tree

and fell, hitting the ground with a sickening shriek. Unfortunately, Morga had cast a spell without his realizing it.

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## Chapter 68

### Chapter 68 — Tension

He had injured his knee, but Morga simply walked on calmly, leaving Haban behind. Even Genin had left him to follow Liam, and he sighed with resignation as the woman looked at him with adoration evident. Undoubtedly a very loyal subordinate.

Repeated use of sorcery only improved the sorcerer's ability, much like a muscle used over and over again.

Unfortunately, Morga's practice to improve his abilities always took a toll on the Kurkans around him. He was never afraid to use them as guinea pigs for any high-level spells he wanted to practice.

Because of his reputation, other Kurkans gradually began to move away from him, so as to avoid becoming fodder for his experiments. Liam was the only one Morga could not cast spells on, so he had to act gentle in front of his King.

Thinking about this only made Haban angrier, and he pounded the ground. He had promised himself that he would be cautious with every move, and then fallen into Morga's spell. He couldn't help gritting his teeth in anger.

"Ah..." he growled.

Morga had cast a similar spell on Seokjin not long ago. The spell made Jin believe he had tripped and fallen because he was drunk, but it had allowed Haban to break the nobleman's leg without causing any trouble. Morga had been away after that, attempting to locate Tomaris, and Haban hadn't expected that they would meet again so soon. For now, he needed to reach the other Kurkans.

Suppressing the pain he felt, he got up and walked after them.

Humans were beginning to gather in the forest. They must have finished preparing for the hunt. He could see the fear in their eyes when the other Kurkans passed among them. But Haban paid no

attention to them, nor did the others. Humans had always been fearful creatures. There was nothing special in this.

As soon as he caught up, Haban stopped beside Morga, frowning with distaste. Morga stared at the princess.

"Is she the one I have heard so much about?" he asked, appraising her.

"She is the Flower of Estia, but no words can live up to her beauty."

"Yes, she is very beautiful."

"Are you impressed?" He asked, but not because he was amazed, just as a distraction from the pain in his knee. Haban gazed coldly at Morga, noting that his expression of admiration gradually became rigid the longer he looked at her. Why?

Although he soon put on a pleasant expression again, he had clearly turned pale for a moment. Morga greeted people cordially, but Haban could tell he wasn't relaxed.

"What's wrong?" He couldn't help but ask.

Morga didn't answer his question. He stood stiffly, pondering.

"What should I do now?" he wondered aloud. "It seems to be a very dangerous situation."

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The barking grew louder the closer the dogs got to their prey. When they found it, Jongin turned toward the sound of the barking and drew an arrow, taking aim as the other hunters followed. Jongin's eyes scanned his surroundings as he kept his head turned forward.

Not far away, he spotted the King of Barbarians.

They had had to lend him one of the largest horses in the stables of Estia, simply because a normal horse was too small. Jongin couldn't help thinking it was strange. It looked like a beast riding another beast.

He held back his laughter and dismissed the thought. But whatever brief mirth he felt vanished when he saw a familiar handkerchief tied to the hilt of Liam's sword. He recognized the pattern of the cloth, and the Estian-style embroidery. He clenched his hand into a fist in sudden rage. It no longer mattered that he was a King!

He gritted his teeth and turned resolutely forward, raising his bow. Setting the arrow, he pulled the string back and released. His hands trembled and the arrow deflected, disappearing into the thick bushes. A second later, a loud squeal echoed through the forest and a wild boar burst from the bushes. It had large, sharp fangs. The arrow was embedded in one of its eyes...

It moved towards them, heading towards Liam and Jongin.

At that moment, all the squires brandished their spears and javelins. Liam held out his hand and Genin handed him a javelin. As soon as he grasped it, he swung his arm back unhesitating. His muscles expanded, the cloth of his clothing tightening against his body, and he narrowed his eyes, his golden pupils glowing.

His rib cage swelled as he breathed and held it. The solid javelin, made of ash, shot out like an arrow and pierced the skin and hard flesh of the animal, punching out the other side. The rushing boar rolled over on the ground, instantly dead.

"....."

Everyone present at the hunting ground stared at the boar, stunned. Even if the javelin was made for hunting, that was not enough to catch a boar.

Normally several people had to join forces and attack with the help of hunting dogs. But Liam had easily killed it on his own.

In addition, the javelin had penetrated it completely. That was impossible with the strength of a human.

Alone among the stunned crowd, the Kurkans were extremely calm. Their attitude was startling, but they seemed completely natural.

Later, the squires dragged the carcass of the boar away. Liam

watched as the boar left blood stains in its wake, and opened his mouth.

"If it hadn't been for the arrow, I wouldn't have caught it."

Liam looked at Jongin. His eyes curved slightly.

"Consider this capture made by the Prince."

The concession was mocking, and implied that he could hunt all he wanted. He was confident. Jongin's face twisted. He looked at the boar sharply.

"It belongs to no one," he declared coolly. The confused squires dragged the unclaimed boar onto a wagon and Jongin looked at the sky, gray and cloudy, as if it would rain any morning. Slapping the spurs to his horse's sides, the horse moved forward, startled at the abrupt command, and the hunting party moved deeper into the forest.

As the path narrowed, the group moved into longer lines. Though they seemed scattered in their hunting, Liam was following Jongin all the way. The slow chase was eating away his nerves. When he finally pulled alongside Liam's horse, Jongin couldn't contain himself. But before the words could leave his lips, he heard a gravelly voice.

"You told me not to covet what you possess..."

Jongin looked at Liam. The Kurkan continued speaking, his reins loose in his fingers.

"If it has no owner, no...it's not even an object, doesn't that change things?"

"...What do you mean?"

"It's exactly as I've explained it to you. I don't have to add or subtract anything." Liam talking, and the two men stared at each other. "She has no owner, and she is not an object. It means she is free to choose whomever she wants."

Liam paused. Their stares were scathing. Then he attacked again.

"But I don't think she would never choose the Crown Prince...what are you so worried about?" He smiled.

"Were you planning to perform an incestuous marriage?"

A shrill laugh rang out. Jongin laughed in vain as the handkerchief tied around Liam's wrist brushed his cheek. His blue eyes flashed with madness and a breathless scream rang out from his attendants as he raised his bow.

The tip of the arrow, sharpened with a whetstone, pointed toward Liam's golden eyes.

"Keep talking, King," Jongin said coldly.

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## Chapter 69

### Chapter 69 — Proposition

Jongin's fingers pulled the bowstring taut. His attendants didn't dare dissuade him. Given his horrible personality, the squires and chasers feared he would release, and held their breath. But while everyone else was paralyzed, Liam laughed. Even though his eye could be pierced by an arrow, he seemed amused, his eyes shining.

"Can you let go of the bowstring?" He asked arrogantly. "A baby who only does what is asked of him, and who is always attached to his mother's skirt."

".....!"

The hand on the bowstring was trembling, and Jongin's breathing became more agitated. The tip of the arrow trembled, but still pointed at Liam.

"You've never done anything on your own. You don't even know quite what you want, you've just wickedly used the princess as a shield." Liam stroked his chin.

"Look around you, Crown Prince. There's no one here to cover for you, what are you going to do?"

His golden eyes glowed strangely in the shadowy forest. He whispered quietly to Jongin.

"Can you shoot that arrow at me?"

Jongin gnashed his teeth, muttering a string of insults. Just as Liam's eyes curved in satisfaction, Jongin ended up doing something he shouldn't have done.

The arrow shot out.

"....."

Jongin held his breath. His hand had been trembling, so it hadn't hit



Liam in the eye. Instead it stuck in his shoulder.

Then everything happened in the blink of an eye.

Liam raised his bow and shot the horse Jongin was riding. The horse reared, whinnying, and Jongin fell off, followed by Liam, who stepped on his wrist. Jongin cried out in pain as his bones broke.

"Your Highness!!!"

The forest immediately erupted into chaos. Jongin's attendants shouted, and the knights drew their swords. Among the noisy humans, only the Kurkans remained quiet. They watched, expressionless and emotionless, as if they had foreseen the commotion.

But when the knights approached, they moved to block them, so no one could reach Liam and the Prince.

"Out of the way!"

"We can't do that. It was the Crown Prince who proposed a hierarchical dominance fight."

"Hierarchical dominance fight! What vulgar and barbaric behavior...!"

Haban with an expressionless face, warned the unbridled knight.

"Go, if you want to die."

"....."

The Kurkans looked at them coldly. Although there were not even ten Kurkans, the knights backed away with frightened expressions.

As the disturbance broke out behind him, Liam pulled the arrow out of his shoulder and threw it on the ground. Grabbing Jongin by the neck, he lifted him up, ignoring the blood gushing from his wound.

Jongin was struggling with all his might, but his feet weren't touching the ground and his wrist was twisted in a strange direction.

Liam smiled at Jongin, who was staring as if he wanted to kill him.

"Wasn't it you who attacked first?" Liam's words were full of sincerity.  
"Act in self-defense, Crown Prince."

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The hunt ended in the worst possible way.

Jongin was taken back in a wagon like one of the trophy animals. Cerdina forgot her regal bearing and behaved as if she had gone mad. Many were surprised to see the usually kind and gentle queen nearly delirious. Even if she had lost her mind because of her son's injury, her behavior was still strange.

Crying frantically, she saw the Kurkans approaching and watched them with bloodshot eyes, then fastened on Liam. He spoke calmly, though she was looking at him with hatred.

"It was an unexpected accident."

The corners of her lips lifted. With a haunting smile, she said wickedly, "You will regret this, King."

Thus ended the hunt, and the royal palace was disturbed by the incident. Unsure how to approach the case, the royal court decided not to hold a trial for the present. Jongin had been badly wounded, but the circumstances were very complex. Even if Liam had overreacted, Jongin had shot the arrow first, though according to those who had accompanied Jongin, he had been provoked.

Liam had probably taken advantage of the situation.

Due to Jongin's actions, the negotiations couldn't be concluded. Instead of using Jennie, the cunning man had used Jongin to get what he wanted.

The strange thing was that the reason Jongin had done so was his fury at Liam's mention of an incestuous marriage. In Estia, consanguineous marriages were permitted to protect the bloodline.

But it wasn't recommended except as a last resort.

Of course, there was no reason for Jennie and Jongin to get married, but Jongin had still lashed out as if Liam had stabbed him.

Until now, Jongin had been tormenting Jennie as if she were an object, his property. Although it gave him the satisfaction of humiliating her, it was an indication of his own low self-esteem and possessiveness.

But what Liam had said to her in the barracks was strange, and there had been situations where Jongin acted like he was interested in her. Jennie sighed and set down the document in her hand.

But what was the point now? It was all over.

There was a stack of documents piled on her small table, but Jennie had no interest in them. Peering out the window, she could see the fire burning in the distant Queen's Palace. Cerdina had taken Jongin there and was guarding him.

Cerdina had expected some conflict during the hunt, but she hadn't thought Jongin would be seriously wounded. And she was clearly not in her right mind.

Looking out at the palace, Jennie closed the curtain and sat down on the couch, burying her face in her palms.

"....."

Since returning from the forest, she hadn't been able to do anything. Even though she wasn't alone, she couldn't focus enough to go through the documents. Right now it was difficult even to think of the peace treaty. All her hard work had been futile.

What should she do?

No matter how much she thought about it, there was nothing else to be done. As the negotiations became more complicated, even tax reform became uncertain. It would be too obvious if she tried to manipulate Seokjin again using the succession. And she couldn't take advantage of the Queen's Gypsy parentage because she had no real evidence.

She felt lost. She bit her lips until they were swollen and red.

".....?"

There was a knocking on the glass balcony door that seemed familiar, and a shadow behind the curtain.

Standing, she slowly walked forward. The intruder tried to open the door, as if he couldn't wait for her to reach it.

When she pulled aside the curtain, she looked up at the man on the other side of the glass door. And before she could pretend to be surprised, she stopped. His golden eyes were grim, filled with a mixture of compassion, affection, sadness, and anger, all directed at Jennie.

She didn't understand his expression, and as soon as he saw her surprise, Liam quickly wiped it away and smiled with his usual mischief, knocking on the glass again. Jennie opened the latch and he stepped impatiently inside.

"What's for dinner?"

The question made her smile, and he pulled her close, his chin resting on her head.

"I didn't get to eat because I was busy, and I'm sure you didn't either." Ignoring the fact that he had broken Jongin's wrist, he suggested, "Let's go eat something delicious together."

But Jennie shook her head. She had no appetite.

Gently, she pushed him away.

"How's your shoulder?" She asked. She had heard Jongin had shot him with an arrow, but he seemed fine.

"It hurts," Liam replied, frowning.

"...Much?"

"I rarely get hurt, but because of you, I've already been wounded

twice."

Of course, Jennie wasn't to blame for Jongin shooting him, but she didn't refute him because he was injured. Liam gently traced the bridge of Jennie's nose with his fingers.

"You feel guilty, right? That's why we should have dinner together. Patients need to be fed properly to recover."

Jennie smiled. Liam was a sophist. But soon the smile faded. The thoughts of the failed negotiations popped into her head, and she knew the Kurkans would return to the desert soon. There would be no more time with Liam. The thought of his leaving for a place so far away made her heart twist strangely.

She had become used to Liam turning her life upside down, and now his presence was normal to her.

Could they be together again?

She knew the answer. It would not happen. When she looked down silently, she heard a sigh.

"It's all over," said Liam. He looked down into her eyes. "Though they cannot punish us, any moment the King will order the expulsion of the Kurkans..."

He placed his hands on her cheeks, conveying his warmth for her.

"This country would collapse even if negotiations had been completed. Stop holding on to this."

And he said something she would never have imagined.

"Come with me to the desert."

The sweet whisper penetrated her heart.

"Be my fiancée, Jennie."

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## Chapter 70

### Chapter 70 — Sorry

Jennie didn't even realize she was holding her breath. Only when she felt her heart tightening did she finally inhale. Perhaps it was because of shock, but her mind was blank. She couldn't think of anything. Hugging the mute and paralyzed Jennie, Liam continued whispering.

"Have you ever seen a desert? You can't imagine how beautiful it is to look at the golden sand spread across the panorama."

The man's fierce eyes gazed lovingly at her, dangerously enchanting. She looked up at Liam as if under a spell. She could imagine a vast sandy desert stretching out like an ocean. She had never seen it, but surely it would be precious as gold.

"And it's not all just sand. In the deepest part of the desert, where the Kurkans live, there is a meadow. In that place, the flowers you like always bloom."

His face had moved close without her noticing, so close that their eyelashes touched. Those golden eyes before her shone like stars.

"In that place you will have everything you want."

I will make it happen.

The words were firm. Jennie's eyes were wet and she closed them tightly. Desperation overwhelmed her and her legs trembled, as if they would give out any moment. Right now she didn't care whether Liam was lying or telling the truth. Either was fine. Even if it was a sweet lie, she didn't mind believing it, even if she died.

There was only one reason for it.

**I like you, Liam.**

The words she couldn't say whirled in her mind, so powerfully that she feared they would slip out. Jennie pressed her lips together tight and buried her face in Liam's chest. In truth, she had liked him since

the first time they met. From their first night together, she had never forgotten him.

The lonely princess had been sabotaged by a stranger. She had known he was dangerous and still let him come to her, and in the end, everything fell apart.

But oddly, she had liked that. She liked losing control and order. And this was just the same. She wanted to follow the man who was tempting her and break all the ties that bound her. She wanted to escape into the desert of golden sand.

But she could not and should not. When she was born with the name of Estia, Jennie had inherited the responsibilities and duties of a Princess. She couldn't stain that name with her own hands.

Her head began to ache with the conflicting desires, and she had to force herself to calm down before she gave the answer neither of them wanted.

"...I'm sorry."

Liam looked at her silently. Her words emerged haltingly, as if someone was strangling her.

"I... I can't abandon Estia."

And having spoken the words, she closed her mouth. Liam gave a piercing look, but no further words came from her trembling lips. When she bit her lower lip, his face contorted and the emotions he had wiped away appeared again.

"...You." Suddenly he spoke, irritated. "Did you ever feel that your thoughts were strange?"

Jennie blinked uncomprehendingly. Liam's voice rose.

"Your dedication to Estia, your choice to die without opposing the royal family!"

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## Chapter 71

### Chapter 71 — Make Me Miss You

Liam hugged Jennie tighter.

"Didn't it ever seem strange to you?"

His eyes were burning with rage, and looking into them, she felt a strange wave of confusion, disgust, and rejection. Nothing seemed strange to her. She had to devote all her efforts to Estia. For the sake of the country, as its princess, of course she should...

The smooth flow of her thoughts suddenly shattered as a new question rose that she had never asked before. Was she really supposed to do that? Doubt rose and suddenly her vision dimmed, the strength leaving her body.

"Jennie!" Liam caught her as she collapsed, pain storming through her. Her head ached as badly as if someone had struck her with a hammer. She couldn't even scream, she could only gasp silently as she shuddered in Liam's arms. The pain was intense, but brief, and when she could focus her eyes again, she realized she was crying.

"Ah..." The small sound escaped her belatedly, and her gaze lifted to Liam. He was gritting his teeth, and strangely, he looked as if he had suffered more than she. It was difficult to move, but Jennie reached to caress his cheek. Gently, just as he had done to her.

His jaw relaxed, and his eyes slowly closed. But soon he turned his head to catch her hand, kissing the back of it, every inch, leaving none of it untouched.

Turning, he carried her to the bed to lay her down, but Jennie clung to him. She didn't want him to leave her. Liam sighed as she clung to his neck like a spoiled girl and sat down on the edge of the bed, holding her in his arms. They didn't speak. Liam held her against his chest, and in the silence the only sound they heard was the breathing of the other.



After a time, Liam gently touched her, wiping the tears from her reddened eyes with his fingers, brushing away the clinging strands of silver hair. His affection for her was palpable. How long had he been caressing her? As Jennie finally calmed, she heard his quiet voice.

"...I should have found you sooner." He kissed her head. "Think again, Jennie. I'll give you some time before I leave."

"....."

"Instead of the Princess of Estia or the wife of Seokjin, becoming the Queen of the Kurkans will be more fun and interesting."

Even if he asked her again, her answer would be the same. But Jennie didn't dare to tell him so. There wasn't much time left. Instead of wasting it with unnecessary things, it would be better to leave with good memories. The time she had spent with Liam was the happiest of her life.

But Liam had seen through her. He pushed open the door to her heart, no matter how hard she tried to shut it.

"You'd better think it over. You really don't plan to marry Seokjin, right?" He asked her mischievously, as she avoided his eyes. "You're going to miss me."

"...Make me do it."

The brief answer left him momentarily puzzled, and she looked at him uneasily. She wasn't used to this, she wasn't quite sure what to do. But she was still trying to reach out to him awkwardly, her eyes lowering as her lips moved closer to him.

"During the day..." She whispered, kissing his lips softly. "And during the night, make me miss you."

His golden eyes shivered from the storm she had created.

"Jennie, you..." His eyes were fierce and he spoke almost angrily. "Do you know what a man thinks, when he's told such things?"

Of course she didn't know. Liam's mouth curved in a thin smile as she

shook her head, and only after she thought about it did Jennie realize she had been rather shameless.

"Well, but never mind."

In a swift movement, he kissed her, but unlike Jennie's soft kiss, his was wild. He bit her lower lip and then teased her tongue, rubbing and sucking on it. He tortured her sensitive palate and only pulled away when she moaned. Running his fingers over her slightly swollen lips, he looked down at her.

"In the future, don't speak that way to any other man."

She was panting breathlessly from his kiss, and she flinched as he grabbed her wrist.

"Touch, Jennie."

Taking her hand, he made her touch her own breast. The sensation of touching herself was strange; she had never done it before. Jennie's lips trembled. She didn't know what to do. Their hands moved down her breast, and together both ran over her belly, between her legs, stopping at a place that only Liam himself had touched before.

"You said you didn't want to come with me..." Liam said to Jennie, who was frozen. "I'll show you how to do it without me."

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## Chapter 72

### Chapter 72 — Acute Senses

Liam's words made her face heat. Jennie couldn't even refuse, since she had tempted him first.

Placing her between his legs, he sat back against the head of the bed and leaned over to remove her slippers, leaving her barefoot. When he pulled up her skirt to bare her thighs, she called his name.

"Liam..." It was a timid protest.

"Embarrassed?" Jennie asked as he ran his lips through her hair.

Of course she would be embarrassed. It would be strange if she weren't. But he hadn't asked the question to get an answer.

"So, should I cover your eyes?"

She didn't want that, but she nodded her head. It seemed better than the way it was. She gasped when she saw what he had in mind.

"That's..."

"I got it by catching animals."

Nonchalantly, he waved the handkerchief she had given Jongin. Why was he holding that? Liam smiled at her amazement.

"Did you like the beast I hunted?"

Instantly, her heart pounded and her face flushed, heat spreading. Jennie lowered her head and Liam smiled, licking the back of her neck.

"If I had known you would like it so much, I would have skinned it and given you the skin."

"...Don't do that." Even if Jongin's skin had any value, she didn't want it given away. Instead of responding to her denial, he bit the back of

her neck lightly, and Jennie pushed him away. She'd had to cover her neck before because he'd bitten her so hard and she didn't want to be wearing high-necked dresses again. Liam caught her protesting hand and licked it.

"Close your eyes, Jennie."

The handkerchief slid over her face and Liam deftly tied the knot behind her head, carefully checking to make sure she wouldn't feel uncomfortable.

"Thanks to you, I've realized something," he said casually. "I'm very jealous."

Under the handkerchief, Jennie blinked. Her eyelashes rubbed against the cloth and she closed her eyes again.

"You?"

He was always so relaxed and unflappable, a handsome man with so much to offer. How could he feel that way? It seemed unbelievable.

"Yes, I felt the same way that day in the forest," he answered. The sensation of having her eyes blindfolded made Jennie feel strange as he pulled her close, her toes curling. "I can't imagine you with another man..."

He closed his mouth and said no more. Wrapped in his arms, Jennie didn't know what to say. She could only hope her red ears were covered by the handkerchief. His strong arm reached out and he grasped her thigh in his hand, his voice sounding of frowning displeasure.

"Why aren't you gaining weight?"

Jennie pretended she hadn't heard the question. It had been difficult to control her diet with Liam feeding her other things, and though her appetite had increased, she still ate sparingly when he couldn't see. But fortunately he didn't push the issue. She had no idea what she would say, if he kept asking.

She was startled to feel his hand on her left breast, and he smiled as

he took her other hand and placed it on her right breast.

"You touch your breast first. I will touch the other one."

She hesitated and then obeyed, gently squeezing.

She felt a tingling of excitement in her lower belly, and heard his soft chuckle in her ear. With her eyes covered, her other senses were heightened. She could hear the slightest sound and shuddered at the slightest touch. With these enhanced senses, she slowly mimicked Liam's movements.

Gently, he caressed her breast, pinching her nipple with his index finger and thumb. Pinching her own nipple made her feel very strange. According to the customs and etiquette of the royal family, it was considered immoral to touch oneself. She had been taught that she shouldn't indulge in carnal lust, and that it was her duty to please her husband.

Liam was teaching her to break another taboo. It felt so good, she stretched her legs, tingling. Her thighs quivered as they parted slightly, revealing a deep and secret place.

Resting her head on his shoulder, she drew a deep breath. Perhaps because she couldn't see anything, it was easier to be bold. Brushing her lips against Liam's neck, she caressed his forearm with her other hand. And then, without his instruction, she pinched and rubbed her nipple. It felt pleasurable.

"You're doing very well, Jennie."

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## Chapter 73

### Chapter 73 — Remember

Jennie thrilled at his praise. When she tilted her head back and lifted her lips, Liam kissed her as if he had been expecting it. It felt so good, she almost couldn't bear it when his tongue slipped inside, licking her deeply.

"Ahh, hmm...."

She let out a moan, enjoying the pleasure as Liam kissed her. Pulling his hand down from her breast, he moved it to her legs, brushing her sweat-dampened thighs and touching her wet underclothes. The embarrassment that arose then dwarfed what she had felt when she had touched her breast, and Jennie tried to withdraw her hand. But she couldn't. Liam held it firmly where it was.

Gripping her hand, he made her explore through her underclothes, and then touch herself inside, feeling her own wetness.

"Ah, Liam..."

Jennie was flustered, her legs shaking. Every time her fingers touched her own flesh, her hips jerked, and she could feel the swelling of her clitoris. Every time she touched it with her fingers, her face burned.

But it wasn't over. Liam moved his own hand to touch the edge of her wet opening, and Jennie sobbed aloud.

"Now can you do it alone, Jennie?" He gently bit her earlobe, prompting her softly. "I'm going to take care of the bottom, so you rub the top."

His thick finger pushed inside her and her face flushed with embarrassment as she obeyed, rubbing her clitoris. Liam's fingers flexed deftly as they moved inside her, stroking fast and deep, and produced a humiliatingly wet noise.

Jennie's hand moved, but despite her efforts, she was finding it difficult to keep up with him.

"Until when...ahh...does it have to be done?"

"Until you come once. Touch your breast too."

Her other hand was placed on her breast, and thanks to Liam's thoughtfulness, she was now touching both her breast and clitoris at the same time.

"You're a smart princess, so you'll be able to do what I've taught you, right?"

If she hadn't been blindfolded, she would have glared at him. But Jennie was in the dark and couldn't seem to get her bearings. Her body quivered as she rubbed her clitoris and Liam's fingers pushed into her over and over in time with her movements.

Her mind was filled with embarrassment and pleasure, and Liam licked her ear.

"Yes. You're doing well," he whispered.

Behind her backside, she could feel something heating, slowly hardening. As soon as she felt his arousal, Jennie shuddered and everything inside her ignited. In the total darkness, the sounds and sensations were so intense. Without her realizing it, another finger had joined the first moving in and out of her opening, and it was becoming difficult to endure the movement. The more the wet sound tormented her ears, the more her pleasure increased.

A tingling in her belly tightened, and her insides were so hot.

"Hmm..."

Jennie moaned, rubbing her clitoris harder, lost in instinctive response. Liam moved her legs apart with one hand, watching every moment intently.

"Remember that clearly."

Another finger slid into her. A shuddering pleasure wracked her body and she moaned again. The fingers inside her moved faster, harder, intensifying.

"What you did with me in your bed."

"Ahh, hmm, ah, Liam...!"

"Every time you lie down on the bed and cover yourself with the blanket... you will remember what I have taught you at this moment." His soft voice filled her ears. "Never forget that, Jennie."

Her back arched as all the sensations she felt erupted at the same time, and her lower body tightened.

"Ahhhhhhh...!"

Jennie shuddered as she reached her first climax.

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## Chapter 74

### Chapter 74 — Innocent Princess

As she shuddered, her muscles cramping, Liam slowly removed his fingers from her opening. When her moans finally quieted, he pulled the blindfold off. The sight that greeted her made her feel like crying. The large hand rubbing her white thighs was soaked with the fluids she had spilled.

As soon as he realized what she was looking at, he deliberately moved his hand back between her legs, smiling as he used the back of his hand to rub her, producing that wet sound again.

It seemed that he was forcing her to confront what she had done, but Jennie could think of nothing to say. Her lips pursed. She had certainly been able to climax.

Suddenly, she remembered that his manhood had been pressing behind her, and Jennie turned to face him, sitting before him between his legs. The front of his trousers was bulging, and Liam had no intention of hiding it. He gave her a lascivious look and leaned back comfortably. His golden eyes were filled with passionate fire, shamelessly admiring Jennie's body, and he slowly smiled as he lifted his eyes to hers.

Although he didn't say what he wanted, he made it very clear.

His eyes were filled with desire. He wanted to thrust that hardened manhood inside her until she was crying and begging and climaxing.

But instead of feeling fear, she found it erotic. She swallowed, feeling a tingling in her lower body.

Settling between his thighs, she laid her hands on his chest. She ran her hands over his wide chest, broad shoulders, and thick arms, then removed his shirt to bare his skin. Liam quietly watched.

"Liam." Jennie steeled herself. "I want to make you feel good too."

She wanted to give him a memory of her. She hoped that he would

think of her through the days and nights. Slowly stroking his exposed upper body, she asked a question.

"How am I supposed to do this...?"

The wild beast's eyes were frightening, but she didn't avoid his gaze. Liam stared at her and sighed.

"...Ahh." He licked his lips, his voice restless. "You keep...saying things recklessly."

His large hand gently gripped Jennie's chin, slipping his index and middle fingers into her mouth. His eyes narrowed. His fingers ran along the inside of her mouth as if he were testing her.

"You know what I just thought?" He murmured. "If you could look inside my head, you'd be running out of the bedroom right now."

Pulling his wet fingers from her lips, he squeezed her nipple and grinned mischievously.

"Do it with your mouth."

She understood the implication of his words a little too late, and Jennie slowly lowered her gaze. If anything, his manhood was even harder, straining the fabric.

Hesitantly, she unbuckled his belt and pulled his pants down, gingerly pushing his underclothes out of the way, baring his straight, hardened rod.

This...?

Bewildered, she stared at the massive manhood before her. His tip was wet and shiny with liquid, and it looked somehow...fierce. Although she had rubbed it in her hands the other day, it had never occurred to her to put it in her mouth. She wondered if it would even fit. She didn't think it could, it looked even bigger than before.

Liam smiled, stroking his chin as he watched Jennie, who was faltering.

"Can you do it, innocent princess?"

Jennie drew a deep breath, determined. Placing a hand on one hard thigh, she grasped his hot manhood with the other, bending her head. It was so big that she could barely fit him inside, her lips stretching around him. Though it felt like it was too much for her, she kept trying because of the moans issuing from above. As she lapped at his cock like a cat, Liam smiled again.

"You have to stick it in deeper."

Obedying, she pushed it further in. It hadn't gone far before the tip reached her throat, and with his rigid manhood filling her mouth, she gagged, tears filling her eyes. Liam stroked her shoulders.

"Don't overdo it..." he whispered.

But she couldn't give up when she heard the fire in his voice. Jennie tried again, trying to get him in as deep as possible. Her silver hair fell around him like a waterfall and Liam gathered it up to expose her face.

"Ahh, hmmm..." He let out soft moans, his breath panting hotly. "Hmm, Jennie... Why are you so sexual..."

His head fell back as if he couldn't be silent any longer, letting out a deep, masculine cry.

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## Chapter 75

### Chapter 75 — Blame

Jennie was nervous, seeing him, and licked and sucked him more carefully. Liam moaned, long, deep, and low, his hips moving as he attacked her mouth.

"Ah, kkk, I think I'm coming..." He said gruffly, looking at her with her cheeks swelling as his manhood slid into her mouth. "You're too sensual to hold it in, Jennie."

Grabbing her by the hair, he stroked himself with his other hand, and she closed her mouth. She couldn't look away. She was seeing a man driven by his sexual desire, revealing the deepest and truest part of his nature. He moaned again.

"Keep your mouth open," he said quietly, and when Jennie slowly parted her lips, the tip of his manhood touched her tongue. A moment later, her mouth filled with his semen.

"Ahhh, ah..." Liam panted, his heart pounding. Jennie watched him, holding her breath.

Ever since their first encounter he had loved to come inside her. Just as animals marked their territory, he wanted to leave his mark on her. As she held the traces of semen in her mouth, his warm hands stroked her all over. Finally, he caressed her lips, reddened and slightly swollen.

"Spit it out here."

Obediently, she spat the semen into his palm. The sticky liquid mixed with saliva pooled in the center, and he tilted her body back and poured the liquid between her legs, into her opening. Burying his fingers into her, he pushed it deep inside. He left some of his semen marking her wet pink flesh, but the rest he slid inside. By the time he had finished, his manhood was erect again.

Grasping her slender calves in his tanned hands, he spread her legs

wide and rubbed his forearm-like manhood over her opening, thrusting inside her.

"Ahhh..." Jennie arched her back. Although her vagina was greatly dilated, it was still difficult to take Liam's manhood all at once. But the pleasure was greater than the pain. A sobbing moan escaped her as his manhood tormented her inner walls, and Liam leaned over to embrace her as she trembled.

"Ah... Jennie, Jennie..."

He kissed her, thrusting his tongue into her mouth, nibbling her chin and licking her cheek as he began to gently move his hips.

"Ahh, Liam, wait...!"

But Liam paid no attention to her request and only thrust harder, his hips clapping against hers so loudly Jennie's skin turned red. Reflexively, she looked up at him, and the moment she met his eyes, everything else faded into the distance. Liam was openly showing the emotions he felt for her.

"Jennie..." He whispered passionately. "Run away with me, please..."

Jennie blinked. She was afraid. She was afraid to accidentally say, 'I'll do it'.

"I'll take care of everything, so come to the desert with me..."

He grabbed both sides of Jennie's face with his hands and continued speaking.

"If anyone asks..."

With another smacking sound, his manhood penetrated deep inside and Jennie moaned at the intensity, suffering with the pleasure.

"Say I kidnapped you and made you suffer..." He breathed fiercely, his golden eyes gazing at her.

"That the King of the Kurkan carried out a Bride Kidnapping... and that he forced you to become engaged."

Jennie was crying, moaning, feeling him penetrate her so deeply, and she still had to bite her lower lip with all her might to keep from telling him she would follow him.

"You, just, you blame me for everything..." Liam kissed her as she squirmed. "You don't have to take responsibility for anything, Jennie."

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## Chapter 76

### Chapter 76 — You're Good At Lying

His words shocked her even as she sobbed with pleasure. It was a wild and sweet proposal. No other woman in the world had ever received a proposal like that.

But she couldn't respond, and Liam smiled bitterly at her silence. Her heart ached as she saw his eyes darken. She wanted to console him somehow.

She kissed him. Licking his lips awkwardly, she slipped her tongue in, feeling his sharp teeth gently nibble her tongue. Her tongue squirmed as she delved deeper, and he rubbed and sucked her tongue, toying with it. As they kissed she rubbed her breast to show that she was applying what he had taught her, and when their lips parted, he stared at her.

"You..." His voice was broken as he whispered.

"You're not always honest."

His eyes were full of mischief and he bit the tip of her nose, releasing her.

"You're good at lying."

Jennie didn't respond, but it seemed he already knew. He knew how she felt, and knew what she wanted to answer.

That ended the conversation, and he lifted her legs over his shoulders. Because of the considerable difference in their body sizes, it raised Jennie's hips off the bed, and his manhood penetrated deep into her opening.

"Huck...!"

Jennie's eyes widened. It was harder to endure his penetration in this position, and her calves trembled.

His manhood pushed slowly into her and the moment it reached deep inside her, exhilarating heat spread from her lower belly and coursed through her entire body.

She let out a moan, arching her back, the bones of her spine protruding along the curve. Although she was shuddering pitifully, Liam didn't hold back, driving into her intensely.

Jennie could barely lift her arms to hug Liam's neck after she climaxed hard again. Her head tilted back and she pleaded with trembling lips.

"Liam, I, ju... I just came..."

Her insides were soaking, so she was sure he knew it, but he kept moving his waist. She really thought she would die. Raking his back with her fingernails, she spoke desperately.

"I'm exhausted, ahhh, I can't take it anymore..."

"Exhausted?"

"Yes, hmm, I'm exhausted... Let's rest for a bit...."

Liam smiled and moved his waist harder.

"Surely that's another lie."

She had never lied about this, but it was hard to refute him. Her gaze blurred and only moans came from her mouth, saliva streaking from the corners.

Her arms fell away from his neck.

"Ah, ahhhh..."

She had climaxed again. Liam held her back with his sturdy forearms, bracing her with his large hands as he looked mischievously at her. Jennie trembled, disoriented.

Wrapping his arms around her, he rose from the bed, leaving her suspended in the air. Jennie had a bad feeling and began to shake,



but he held her tighter and put her body against the wall. It was cold against her back as her legs floated in the air.

Cloudy as her consciousness was, she wasn't worried about having sex in this position, but was more worried about falling to the floor, and her thighs tightened around Liam. She was surrounding him with all of her strength when his manhood penetrated her opening again.

His huge, hot manhood made obscene sounds as he thrust inside her, his body rocking violently as he pounded into her. Her breasts bounced, her nipples rubbing against Liam's muscular chest.

"Hmm, huh, ahh...!"

Although she had already climaxed multiple times, she felt the tingling again in her lower body and a torrent of fluid squirted at the junction of their joining. She felt like she was losing her mind, her purple eyes unfocused. Tears pooled at the corners of her eyelids and flowed down her cheeks.

"Say my name." Liam's hot tongue licked away her tears. "You have to remember who you're doing it with."

She could only cling to him, trusting the man before her. With her last strength, she embraced him and spoke his name in a whirl of fear and pleasure.

"Ah, Liam..."

Golden eyes filled with satisfaction as Jennie hugged him.

"Hmm, Jennie..."

His teeth bit into her neck, a sharp pain, and Jennie let out a loud cry.

"Ahh, Liam, hmm..."

His thick, rigid manhood thrust deep inside her and hot liquid jetted, filling all her inner walls. Her arms and legs shook with the indescribable pleasure, and even after her body went limp, her fingers trembled.

As Jennie was lost in her climax, Liam continued moving his slightly softened member inside her, and she moaned in despair as he rubbed his semen into her inner walls.

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## Chapter 77

### Chapter 77 — The Time Had Come To Find Out

"Ah..."

Already her insides were soaked with semen. Jennie didn't understand why he kept moving, as if he wanted to expel something else. Her vision was blurred as she inhaled and exhaled with difficulty, clinging to consciousness as it threatened to fade. She counted the number of times he had come inside her and despaired.

It was only twice. She didn't want to pass out this time, but Liam never stopped until he was satisfied.

Every time they had sex, she always did. Even when she begged him in tears that she couldn't do it anymore, he would persuade her and kept penetrating her until she lapsed into unconsciousness.

Jennie called out to Liam feebly.

"Liam..."

"Tell me, Jennie."

She mumbled the first thing that came to her mind to stop him from seducing her again.

"I'm hungry," she said without thinking. But the insatiable man stopped.

"...Damn," he said with a frown. "So you haven't had dinner."

He looked at her body, concerned, measuring her with his eyes to make sure she hadn't lost more weight from starving herself again.

Jennie moaned as he pulled his manhood from her opening, and she felt the liquid inside flow out of her, his semen mixed with her fluids. The white liquid soaked between her legs and over her thighs.

Liam grabbed a cotton cloth and cleaned both her and his manhood

roughly, then wrapped a blanket around Jennie.

"You should have told me earlier that you were hungry..."

It seemed he thought she was starving. But it meant she was able to relax, and she drifted, semi-conscious as Liam whispered that he was taking her to the palace where the Kurkans were staying for dinner, and then he would have someone arrange her bed, so she wouldn't worry. He promised to bring her back before dawn.

Jennie nodded. She was in no condition to listen carefully.

\*\*\*

Sometime later, they arrived at the palace where the Kurkans were staying, and Jennie was awakened by a soft voice.

"Jennie."

A hand stroked her cheek, and she opened her eyes, frowning at the tickling caress. She was on a bed and had a tray full of plates of food in front of her. It didn't surprise her to see so much, but she still wondered who could possibly eat all that.

She was hungry, but she didn't have the energy to eat. Watching her stare at the food anxiously, Liam spoke in a soft voice.

"I'll feed you."

She nodded, and he immediately dug into the food as if he had just been waiting for her permission.

Jennie's mouth opened and closed and he fed her, like a little bird being fed by its parents. She was so tired, her eyes were almost closed, and she wasn't paying attention to what she was eating. She had eaten quite a lot before she remembered that she was supposed to be reducing her meals. Liam smiled.

"I think next time I'll have to feed you first," he whispered. He wanted to tease her about it, but he was afraid she would refuse to open her mouth, so he said no more and continued feeding her.

After eating for so long, she felt quite sleepy, and forgot about etiquette as she yawned widely. Pulling her body a little closer to Liam's, she whispered.

"I'm sleepy..."

"Well, you've eaten more than usual."

Liam gestured and someone picked up the tray to carry it away. Feeling Liam's warmth, Jennie began to lose her struggle with sleep.

"Go back to sleep, Jennie. I'll get you back safely." His voice was calm and lulling, and he gently stroked her silver hair as she drifted off to sleep.

"....."

Reaching for the nightstand, he grabbed his tobacco pipe and lit it in a brazier, taking a puff. His golden eyes, which had been warm for Jennie, grew cold.

"Haban."

Haban had been hiding in the shadows and approached silently, bowing. Liam exhaled a puff of smoke and ordered.

"Tell Morga to come here."

The time had come to find out what was the matter with Jennie.

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## Chapter 78

### Chapter 78 — Devotion to Estia

"Are you going to ask Liam what his zodiac sign is?"

"Don't talk nonsense, Haban."

Haban quickly covered his mouth with one hand at Morga's rebuke, hiding his smile. Morga ignored him and wiped away a cold sweat with the back of his hand. Normally he would have tormented Haban with various spells, but at the moment he was tense and preoccupied with something else. Carefully, he tied back his long hair before he entered the king's bedroom.

In the furthest part of the room, a burly man sat on a wide bed, holding a small form wrapped in a thick blanket in one arm. In his other hand he held a pipe.

He took a puff, slowly exhaling the smoke. The gray smoke filled the air, and though tobacco could influence a Kurkan's nature, there was no hint of languor in his eyes. He was too agitated for it to affect him. His piercing golden eyes stared at Morga.

"Liam." Morga bowed his head in respect.

"Morga," the man said slowly, and Morga slowly raised his head. He recognized what Liam held so lovingly in his embrace. Wrapped in the white blanket was the delicate little Princess of Estia. From the look of her, it seemed she would melt as quickly as a snowflake, captured in the palm of a hand.

He stared at her. Though she was beautiful, she always attracted the eye strangely. He remembered when he saw her in the forest, her face as expressionless as a doll's. Her purple eyes were beautiful, but expressionless. She had perfectly suited the gloom of the forest.

But that same Princess now slept so peacefully, her cheeks flushed. She didn't look like the expressionless doll he had seen. She seemed like a different person. Looking at her slightly parted lips, Morga

could understand why Seokjin was obsessed with her. If such an indifferent person could show a little kindness...

Oh, no.

Morga quickly shook away the thoughts that rose to his mind before he could filter them out. If Liam knew what he was thinking, he would tear him to pieces. And Morga did not want a pitiful or premature death. He had a great future as a sorcerer and wanted to live a long time as the chief of his tribe.

In his mind, he quickly listed twenty-five medicinal herb formulas in reverse order, and only when he was completely composed did he speak.

"There's no problem if tobacco smoke permeates the air. But it can be very poisonous to her, so remember she should not directly inhale the smoke."

"I know."

Morga nodded and approached the bed. Moving the blanket a little, Liam pulled the Princess's hand out.

Even that delicate hand was elegant, with fine veins running its length, and Morga admired it for a moment.

Taking out a medicinal bottle, he let a single drop of potion fall on her wrist. The liquid was as clear as dew but began to darken rapidly on her skin, and then to smoke, crackling until it dispersed, horrible and disturbing. As Morga looked at her clean wrist, which showed no traces of the smoke, he frowned.

"I can't decipher it all, but... I'm sure of this." He said it firmly. "The Princess is under a powerful brainwashing."

Devotion to Estia

Although there seemed to be other spells involved, they were so intrinsic to the overall spell that he could only confirm brainwashing for now.

"The brainwashing is based on her own ideals. Since the princess loves Estia, the brainwashing should have started from that point."

It would have begun as a small seed and grown gradually over time, leading her to eventually prioritize her country over her own welfare. It was also linked to the royal family, so in her mind Estia could only exist if the royal family existed.

"Since the spell went on for a long time, she probably can't distinguish between her own thoughts and brainwashing." Morga's voice was strained. "If you remove the brainwashing recklessly, her mind will collapse."

It was a brainwashing that intertwined the Princess's own values, beliefs, and ideas, accumulated over a lifetime. Now, it could not even practically be considered brainwashing. It was fundamental to her mental structure.

"Dedication to Estia... the Princess's life doesn't even belong to herself."

Morga looked at the princess with sympathy. She honored the family in her role as the Flower of Estia all her life, and worked without caring for her own body because of this imposed devotion, until she had finally been sold to Seokjin. They were using her up, with her consent.

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## Chapter 79

### Chapter 79 — Disclosure

Liam listened quietly and then shook out his tobacco, throwing the ashes into the tray on the nightstand.

"I mentioned that subject to her recently," he said quietly. "There was an intense reaction. Her little body shuddered in pain, she couldn't even scream..."

Liam fell silent, hugging the Princess. Quelling his emotions, he spoke again, calm and serene.

"She told me she wanted to die. Is that a spell too?"

Morga couldn't keep the pitying expression from his face. Words as rough as thorns came from his throat.

"That's... an instinctive defense mechanism."

Liam's cold stare encouraged Morga to keep talking.

"I think the Princess tried to overcome the spell in her own way. Unconsciously, she fought fiercely against the brainwashing, but was defeated each time, and in the end, she chose one method as a last stand..."

Unconsciously, she chose the only escape available to free her from the spell. Morga's lips trembled as he spoke.

"Death."

The room was silent. Liam's lips twitched in a faint smile, but his eyes remained impassive.

Morga shuddered, lowering his eyes to the ground. He didn't dare look his King in the face. He knew Liam's anger wasn't directed at him, but his body still shuddered with fear. Cold sweat ran down his back and for a few moments, everything before his eyes went black. Perhaps feeling the energy coursing through the room, the Princess

shifted, letting out a faint sound of protest.

The suffocating energy vanished in a blink, and Liam sighed as he caressed her.

"I'm sorry. I'm not mad at you, Morga."

"I know..."

Morga, who had died and been resurrected, drew a shaking breath.

"Can I kill the Queen?" Liam asked.

He asked about taking the life of the Queen of Estia as if he could break her neck whenever he wished.

He wasn't bluffing. He could do it if he wanted to.

But he should not do it now. Morga had barely calmed down, but he answered so quickly he nearly bit his tongue.

"Some spells can entwine the lives of others. Until we know what spells have been cast on the Princess, we must not approach the Queen carelessly." The words wounded his pride. "The biggest problem is that the Queen is more powerful than I expected."

Her power was similar to Morga's, but the ability of a sorcerer grew as they succeeded at more difficult spells. The Queen had cast hundreds of spells on many people. The more success she enjoyed, the stronger she would become.

Morga could not do it alone. To discover the spells she had cast and find a way to remove them, he would have to return to Kurkan to enlist other sorcerers. It would take considerable time to unravel these spells, since they had been wrapping around the Princess all her life.

"First, the Princess must be taken to Kurkan..." Morga began, but even after he finished his explanation, he knew that the Princess would never leave Estia on her own.

Liam drew another puff from his tobacco. He was struggling to

suppress his nature, which was intensifying with the power of his emotions.

"I'll do something about it," he said.

\*\*\*

The air was bitter with the aroma of medicinal herbs.

The hands of Estia's noblest woman were a mess, stained and sticky with medicines. Her nails were ragged and her skin was rough.

But Cerdina did not stop her grinding and mixing.

She was doing it alone, without the help of any servants.

Weighing the herbs with a scale, she placed them in order in the pot boiling over a small brazier. With each new item added, the color of the bubbling liquid changed. It turned green when she put in green leaves, crystalline when she added morning dew, and reddish when she added rose petals...

Finally, she approached the bed where Jongin lay.

His whole body was bandaged and he lay as still as a corpse. She was anguished as she plucked a strand of his hair and placed it in a pot, making the liquid glow shimmering gold and then turn pitch black.

Transferring the finished potion to a glass, she poured a drop in Jongin's mouth.

After a long time, his eyelids began to tremble, and then opened, revealing blue eyes.

"Jongin...!"

Cerdina kissed his forehead, tears streaming down her face.

"Jongin, my son, my dear son..."

Unlike the sobbing Cerdina, Jongin was calm and looked at her silently as he swam back to consciousness.

"...Mother." Jongin spoke the thing that had been tormenting him. "I think I like Jennie."

"....."

Cerdina's face went pale and rigid.

"I don't want to just have that child," he said quietly.

"I want her heart."

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## Chapter 80

### Chapter 80 — Hopeful Thoughts

Cerdina was speechless. Her eyes trembled, haggard from being up for days, and she had to force the corners of her mouth to lift. Her bloodshot eyes made her smile look strange. Her fingers were stained and sticky with grass clippings as she caressed Jongin's face slowly. But the words that fell from her trembling lips were cunning.

"Impossible, Jongin. Love is not as dark as the emotion you feel."

"....."

"You're not in love. You just want to possess her."

Jongin looked at his mother in silence. Cerdina had said the same thing, the first time he told her he loved Jennie.

"I told you. When you become King, and then Emperor, you will have the continent under your feet. There will be many such women..."

"Mother."

Jongin's dry lips moved slowly.

"If I don't do what you want, will you cast a spell on me too?"

"Jongin!"

The scream rang through the bedroom and Cerdina looked at his bandaged wrist, panting with agitation.

Instead of screaming again, she leaned over to hug him.

"Don't be so cruel to your mother. I'm doing everything for your sake."

Her slender fingers stroked his silver hair.

"We're almost done, right? Just a little bit left. If you wish, I'll let you

have her heart, too. But then you'll understand. That's no big thing..."

Her whispering voice was filled with inordinate affection. No matter what foolish thing Jongin wanted, she always accepted it. It was always the same. She wanted her son to have the best of everything.

Jongin smiled shallowly. It seemed to him that he didn't act any different from anyone else, even though he wasn't under any spell.

"Then I'll know when I have it," he said to Cerdina, who watched him unblinking. "Please give me Jennie's heart. As long as I can have it...I'll do whatever you want, mother."

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As expected, she had fainted again. Well, not fainted, but fallen asleep.

Or so Jennie believed.

When she opened her eyes, she found herself lying in the bed in the Princess Palace with dim light filtering through the window. It was dawn.

She looked around and found that the bedding that had been all but torn apart during their intense lovemaking had been tidied up and the whole room straightened, as if what had happened the night before had been an illusion.

An inexplicable emptiness filled her heart. Jennie bit her lower lip, but when she turned she found a small note on the nightstand beside her bed, written in rough lettering on a torn scrap of paper.

*[Will you come with me to the desert?]*

Liam still had bad calligraphy, but it seemed a bit better than before. Was he practicing? She couldn't help laughing when she imagined Liam with a quill in his large hands, writing on that small piece of paper.

Jennie hugged the note and threw herself back on the bed. It wasn't appropriate behavior for a princess, but no one was watching.

"....."

She read the note a few more times, then placed it back on her chest.

Oddly it made her think of the intense headache she had the night before. She had headaches frequently, but last night was the first time she had experienced so much pain. Apparently she had reached her limit, but strangely her head felt clearer afterward.

And usually her body felt heavy when she woke up in the morning. She suffered from chronic migraines, and lived in dark, depressive clouds that seemed to permeate to the bottom of her heart.

But now everything was as clear as a sunny day. She thought she could do anything, and for once hopeful thoughts were welling up unstoppably. Her mind was as clear as spring water.

Wouldn't it be good to go to the desert with Liam?

Everything was ruined anyway. The negotiations and tax reforms wouldn't take place. It was better to look to the future than give up her life. Perhaps this was even the path she should follow for the sake of Estia.

Even if she had to give up her reputation to protect her country, she would still be fulfilling her duties as Princess.

So many thoughts were coming that she couldn't have contemplated before. If she really became the Queen of Kurkan, she could persuade them not to invade Estia. She could resume negotiations, or try to make some trade between the two countries.

And...she could be with Liam.

Immediately, her heart began palpitating as if it would explode. Her body shook with the intensity of the emotions. She couldn't control it. She paced around the room, unable to be still as her imagination raced on.

In the desert, she would be free. She could be Jennie, not the Princess of Estia. She could eat what she wanted, she wouldn't have to see her step-brother's face, she wouldn't have to endure her stepmother's

vigilance.

Jennie had to lie down on the floor. Imagining a life without all these bonds and restrictions made her so excited, she felt too warm. Lying with her bare skin against the cold marble floor, she drew deep breaths, calming herself.

There was still time left. She had to think about this decision carefully.

But Jennie knew her heart was leaning one way.

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## Chapter 81

### Chapter 81 — Countess Melissa

The King of Estia commanded the expulsion of the Kurkans. But recognizing that there had been mutual negligence, he did not expel them immediately. They had a grace period of two weeks.

It was decided that after the Kurkans left, Jennie would leave the palace to go to the frontier border, several weeks ahead of schedule. She spent every day busy working and delegating tasks ahead of her departure.

Today her schedule was very busy. Before she began her list of chores, Countess Melissa brought a wooden comb and sat down to comb her hair. Her skills in styling Jennie's hair were as good as the years they had spent together. No one could manage her hair better.

"Seokjin will soon be heading to the western border," she said. "But it looks like he wants to meet with you first."

"That's fine. Anyway, we must meet."

The two continued to talk about certain matters, and as Jennie watched how her silver hair was being styled, she said, "I haven't seen Baroness Cinael."

Countess Melissa's diligent hand paused for a moment before she quietly replied.

"She has been suspended."

She had handled the matter under the authority of head lady-in-waiting, but hadn't informed Jennie because she had been so busy lately.

"You're treating her as the culprit," Jennie remarked calmly.

"....."

Countess Melissa set the comb down on the dressing table.

"I'm sorry, Princess. I tried to do something, but the situation was getting worse...so I thought it would be best if the Baroness went on sick leave and rested for a while."

She was being isolated and treated as the culprit behind the theft of the purple silk dress, but the truth had not yet been discovered. Jennie needed to meet with her and hear her defense.

"I have a couple of hours free this afternoon."

She had set that time to get some rest, and even though she was officially free, she usually had tea while looking through documents.

"I'm going to visit Baroness Cinael."

"Isn't that too sudden?"

"There are things more important than etiquette."

She shuddered, saying those words. She wasn't used to saying that sort of thing, and Countess Melissa looked a little surprised. Jennie continued briskly, setting it aside.

"Please make preparations for that. Since I'm going to visit her, I'll have to bring a gift as a show of courtesy."

After finishing her morning's work, she had lunch and prepared to leave. Boarding the carriage, she had a package of cookies made by the head chef of the Princess Palace. They were Baroness Cinael's favorite.

None of her ladies-in-waiting came from powerful family lineages, and the Baroness lived in an area some distance from the center of the capital. On the way there, Jennie did some speculating of her own.

It would have been better if things had proceeded discreetly. Her ladies-in-waiting would not have singled out and excluded the Baroness for no reason.

She must have done something suspicious.

Perhaps she had stolen the dress to pay off some private loan. But Jennie did not believe she had stolen the dress because of a personal problem. Knowing her personality, Jennie thought the Baroness would have told her, and asked for help.

While she was making these speculations, she had arrived at the Baroness's residence without realizing it. The royal carriage stopped in front of a modest mansion. The woman outside watering flowers in the garden widened her eyes when she saw the carriage, and saw Jennie getting out.

"Princess..."

"Lady."

Jennie smiled and ran to hug her, tears bursting.

The Baroness clung to her as if she would collapse.

The Baron, who had stayed home to comfort his wife, was shocked to see the Princess. In silence, Jennie hugged the Baroness, and when she was finally able to stop sobbing, the Baroness led Jennie inside. As she poured the tea, she explained.

"I get no salary due to being suspended... I had to do without some employees to save a little. Anyway, I have nothing to do at home."

The tea in the cup showed an attenuated pattern as it slowly cooled. Jennie waited for her to speak. The Baroness remained silent until the tea was lukewarm and then began to cry again.

"I'm so frustrated...I was only following instructions..." She wiped the eyes with her handkerchief, but her eyes soon became moist again. She clutched the handkerchief as she continued.

"That day I was told to take out the purple silk dress and take it to the servant outside...that's what I did."

"Who gave you that order?"

Baroness Cinael closed her eyes tightly. She couldn't easily answer that question. After hesitating for a while, she finally spoke carefully.

"...Countess Melissa."

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## Chapter 82

### Chapter 82 — Cerdina's Sorcery

She thought she wouldn't be surprised by any name.

But she had been naive.

"...Countess...Melissa..." She said weakly. Baroness Cinael nodded slowly.

Inside, Jennie didn't want to believe it. Though she had come looking for answers, the reality was so cruel. Most distressing was the Baroness, who had spoken the terrible truth, was also suffering. She was grieving because she knew her words hurt her Princess.

The silence hung in the living room for a long time. Jennie sipped her cold tea and regained her composure.

There were only two options.

Either Baroness Cinael was lying, or Countess Melissa was lying.

Of course, Jennie wanted to trust the Countess.

It made sense that the Baroness had not defended herself to the other ladies-in-waiting and accepted her suspension, doomed to disgrace. At the Princess Palace, Countess Melissa was the most influential person, after Jennie. No matter what the Baroness said, she thought she would not be believed. Besides, knowing how deeply Jennie trusted the Countess, she probably would have been thrown out before she finished speaking.

The Countess had stood by Jennie's side with love and affection since she lost her mother as a child.

There was a bond between them that couldn't be broken by money or power. But it didn't seem like the Baroness was lying. Jennie wanted to believe in the innocence of her ladies-in-waiting.

Perhaps the Baroness and the Countess were telling the truth.

Jennie, whose mind felt strangely clear and clean lately, suddenly found another explanation.

Cerdina's sorcery....

It seemed quite possible. If Cerdina could cast spells, surely she could have done something in the Princess Palace. Suddenly, Jennie felt afraid. She didn't know how powerful Cerdina was, but she couldn't help feeling trepidation.

Had Cerdina cast a spell on Jennie? Jennie had never acted abnormally, like the King or the Countess Melissa. Jennie shook her head when she thought of the King, who was little more than Cerdina's puppet.

"Thank you for telling me, Baroness Cinael. As this is the situation, I think it's best if you rest for the time being."

Jennie promised to think carefully about what the Baroness had told her and pulled out the gift of cookies she had brought. In a few moments the Baroness was eating a cookie and gazing at a paper that Jennie had given her with red-rimmed eyes, bewildered.

"This is...." She mumbled, astonished.

It was a certificate of ownership for a small farm.

The Baroness was speechless.

"I'm arranging a few things before heading for the frontier," Jennie said quietly. "I'm giving equitable contributions among the Princess Palace's ladies-in-waiting, so please accept it."

"No! I can't accept it, I was just doing my job...!"

"It's fine. It's a reward for all the hard work you've done for me so far."

"Princess..."

The Baroness's tears had only just ceased, and now her eyes filled again. Jennie soothed her for a while and then left to return to the

palace.

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Her heart was heavy as she looked out the carriage window.

By the time she arrived at the palace, her thoughts had become more clear. She was going to speak with Countess Melissa and listen to explanation, and then determine if sorcery had been involved.

".....?"

Stepping out of the carriage, Jennie stopped abruptly. The palace was too quiet. When she had gone to visit the Baroness, she had been accompanied only by knights, without her ladies-in-waiting. But now she saw no one.

Only the haunting sound of her own footsteps echoed in empty hallways. Cold air brushed her skin.

Jennie rubbed the back of the hand with the sudden chill, and went to her room to change her clothes. She was startled to see a woman sitting on her bed, and her body reflexively stiffened. Jennie's lips moved awkwardly.

"Huh, why did you come unexpectedly..."

Cerdina slowly stood without replying, approaching Jennie. A bitter scent emanated from her, wafting to Jennie's nose. Why did she smell of grass, rather than her usual perfume?

But she did not have time to wonder. Cerdina's eyes were right before her, a gaze like a dagger, slowly piercing Jennie. Cerdina had completely removed her mask of generosity and kindness. She no longer intended to hide anything. She clicked her tongue.

"I tried to do it moderately."

The cold voice gave Jennie goosebumps, and she took a step back. Her head vibrated as if someone was ringing a thunderous bell. The thought of escape seized her, and she turned quickly to grab the doorknob. But no matter how she tried, the door wouldn't open.

There was a laugh behind her, and suddenly she had a monumental headache.

".....!"

It felt as if someone had reached into her brain and squeezed. Jennie collapsed from the agonizing pain, clinging to the carpet as she lay facedown on the floor. She felt nauseous. Saliva trickled from her lips and tears spilled down her cheeks.

Cerdina watched as Jennie squirmed, and snapped her fingers. Every time she snapped, Jennie grabbed her head and writhed.

"Ah, aah, arg, ahhhhhhh.....!"

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## Chapter 83

### Chapter 83 — In Cerdina's Hands

"Hmm. It's more broken than I thought. That barbarian sorcerer is pretty good. But it doesn't look like he's been able to go deep."

Cerdina frowned, annoyed.

"Actually, it was hard when I cast the first spell four years ago, too. You tried to get out of the brainwashing as soon as the slightest opportunity appeared." She waited, watching until Jennie had suffered enough to break her will, then asked generously, "Does it hurt, Jennie?"

Jennie nodded frantically. She apologized without hesitation for her behavior. She would have kissed Cerdina's feet to stop the pain.

Cerdina burst out laughing and snapped her fingers, and the hellish pain disappeared instantly. Jennie sat on the floor, panting. Sitting across from her, Cerdina gently stroked her silver hair. When Jennie tried to turn her head away, it felt as if her heart collapsed. Her body didn't move, but she felt like a stranger in her own body. Even inhaling and exhaling felt strange, as if her spirit was in someone else's body. Cold sweat ran down her back and Cerdina smiled as fear flashed in Jennie's eyes.

"You don't have to be so afraid." Slowly, she scratched under Jennie's chin with a fingernail, drawing a red line in the white skin. Jennie had no choice but to endure the pain. Looking at her quivering purple eyes, Cerdina smiled graciously.

"Have you ever strangled someone you love?"

Jennie's hands moved by themselves and closed around her own neck, strangling her. Cerdina's eyes curved as she watched her turn red from lack of air.

As soon as her consciousness faded, her hands released, and Jennie gasped in a breath. She felt as if her heart had been about to explode,

and she didn't get much time to compose herself.

"Have you ever stuck a knife in a heart?"

Jennie couldn't move her lips. Cerdina pondered and then said, "ahh..."

She touched Jennie's lips with a finger, and only then could Jennie speak.

"Oh, no..."

"You don't want to, do you? You hate pain."

"Yes... I hate it..."

"Then don't think about anything unnecessary." Cerdina caressed Jennie's pale cheek lovingly. "Don't say anything to Jongin. I don't think he'll like you being in this state. Of course, you'd better not tell anyone else either." She smiled coldly. "We'll keep it a secret between mother and daughter."

Jennie nodded slowly, her eyes blank. Tears slid down on her cheek, caught on her chin, and dropped on the floor. Cerdina smirked.

"Starting today, control your eating. The wedding is near, but you've gained a lot of weight."

She stood gracefully and looked at Jennie, who sat despondently on the floor.

"Then I'm leaving," she said quietly. "It's been nice talking to you, Jennie."

The doorknob, which hadn't budged in spite of Jennie's desperate attempts, turned easily. Cerdina opened the door and left.

"....."

Alone, Jennie lowered her head. Her silver hair fell like a waterfall and a hollow laugh escaped her. It was ridiculous. She had been sure she hadn't been bewitched, just because she didn't look like the King.

But now she knew she was in a terrible state.

Another puppet.

Cerdina's warning was clear. The Queen could control her body, which meant if Jennie did anything stupid, she would make her suffer.

Jennie imagined herself strangling Liam. Plunging a knife into his heart. Her mind had only just cleared, and now it darkened again. The darkness swept over her from head to toe.

For a long time, she stayed where she was. Slowly, she raised her head, looking around in a daze. The memory of her euphoric night in this room with Liam seemed distant. Her ankles were still bound with chains. The freedom she had dreamed of had never existed.

"Liam..." Jennie said desperately.

Tears well up again. She would never set foot on those desert sands in her life. She would never be with him.

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## Chapter 84

### Chapter 84 — Leah Serving Cerdina

The tuberose in the garden of the Princess Palace were in full bloom. The sight of the small white flowers swaying in the wind was pleasant, but Jennie only stared at them blankly before she ordered in a flat voice.

"Take them all out. It would be better to plant other flowers."

She was the one that had asked them to plant tuberose. Her ladies-in-waiting were perplexed at the whimsical order, but everyone knew the bride's feelings before her marriage were unstable.

"Princess!"

Jennie turned at the sound of the voice. It was Seokjin Gyeongbaek of Oberde. It was earlier than the time they had agreed to meet, but since Jennie was not in the palace, he had come to the garden.

For some reason, he fell silent after he called her, and approached slowly as he looked at Jennie, who stood in front of the snow-white flower garden. He was acting quite decently, which was rare for him.

"Do you like tuberose?" he asked.

"...No." Jennie whispered, gazing at the flowers. "I don't like them."

Together, they walked around the garden. Seokjin was planning to go to the western frontier that night, and talked to her about a few things, mostly wedding-related matters. He also talked about what kind of wedding dress would look good on her and how the wedding hall should be decorated.

Jennie listened silently, nodding occasionally, and he frowned at her expressionlessness.

"At least you could fake a smile," he said. "You're so stiff."

When she forced the corners of her mouth upward, that satisfied him.

He took her hand and she did nothing. She didn't have the will to pull away. She barely noticed the passage of time. She was lost in her thoughts as they walked on, and when it ended and he left, she returned to the Princess Palace. Cerdina was waiting for her.

Sitting on the sofa in the living room, Cerdina was waited on by Countess Melissa, whose eyes were out of focus. Just like the ladies-in-waiting at the Queen's palace, she moved without expression, like a living puppet.

Jennie observed the scene, then approached Cerdina and bowed her head.

"I have met with Seokjin of Oberde," she said.

"I see." Cerdina nodded and pointed to the space beside her. Jennie sat obediently, emptied the cold tea out of her cup, and then picked up the teapot to pour fresh tea. To Cerdina, this was normal. She no longer wore a mask in front of Jennie. She was showing her true nature.

She visited the Princess Palace as frequently as if it were her own, and often called Jennie to the Queen's Palace to serve her. Cerdina seemed pleased with Jennie's performance as a lady-in-waiting.

As the amount of time she spent with Cerdina increased, the amount of food she ate plummeted.

Cerdina undressed Jennie every day and made her stand in front of a mirror, pointing out every flawed area without missing any detail, to prove that she should adjust her diet.

Today she did the same. Cerdina stood Jennie in front of a large mirror to examine her naked body, then brought out a tape measure to confirm that her waist was slightly smaller than before.

"We can't allow the Flower of Estia to show any flaws, can we?"

"...Yes." Jennie replied. Her eyes were dark and dull. Cerdina stroked her cheek affectionately, as if she were rewarding a pet for its obedience.

"Come here. I'm going to do your hair."

Taking the wooden comb Countess Melissa gave her, Cerdina began to personally comb Jennie's hair. She gazed at the silvery hair, soft as silk, and stroked it.

Jennie stood still and looked at Countess Melissa, who stood like a puppet in the corner of the room.

She thought her heart was numb, but it tingled again.

"If I behave meekly..."

She opened her mouth to speak to Cerdina.

"Please don't forget to release them."

"Of course, Jennie. I will release them the day you go to Seokjin's territory for the wedding. I made a promise under my name," Cerdina said generously. "And when the time is right, I will bring you back to the royal palace."

"...Yes, mother."

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## Chapter 85

### Chapter 85 — Trying To Evade Him

After playing with Jennie's hair, Cerdina picked up a few strands that had fallen out and Jennie escorted her to the main entrance of the Princess Palace, then returned to her office. Sitting down at her desk, she picked up some documents. There was no lady-in-waiting to serve her. A sneer curled Jennie's mouth as she read.

Bring her back to the palace? Cerdina just wanted to keep tormenting her. No other reason would bring her back. She wouldn't allow it.

Jennie smiled bitterly, slumping against her desk.

Closing her eyes, she counted the days until the wedding. There wasn't much time left before she could rest forever. Her will to live was long gone.

Death was the only revenge she could have, and the only way to be free.

Cerdina had promised the day Jennie left the palace, she would free her ladies-in-waiting from brainwashing. She had only gotten Cerdina to promise this by wagging her tail like a dog. So after the wedding, she could commit suicide on the first night with Seokjin....

"....."

Jennie covered her face with her hands. She couldn't think clearly lately. Since that day, all the thoughts she had were interrupted and she was sunk in melancholy. Her mind felt like wet earth after rain.

The pain Cerdina had caused and the horrible feeling of strangling herself kept replaying vividly in her mind. Whenever she tried to rid herself of those memories, his name always popped into her mind. It hurt. She was trying to forget that name.

*—Have you ever strangled someone you love?*

*—Have you ever stuck a knife in a heart?*

That soft voice rang in her ears again and her shoulders shook as Jennie covered her ears with her hands, silently sobbing. Alone, she closed her eyes and tried to eradicate the overflowing tide of fear.

Misfortune only becomes greater when shared. He didn't belong in her darkness. Jennie wished with all her heart that that radiant man would always be in the sunlight.

\*\*\*

Time flew by. It seemed to go even faster because she wasn't in her right mind. But it didn't matter.

Rather, Jennie wished that it would go.

Tomorrow was the day the Kurkans would leave.

Jennie walked alone in the garden of the Princess Palace late at night. Cerdina had been bothering her all day, and she was exhausted and wanted to go to bed immediately, but she could not. As before, she was sure Liam would visit her tonight.

She missed him so much. But she didn't want to see him. She didn't want to have to say cruel words to him or reject him to coldly push him away. She would rather he just left. If he did, then she could believe the love he had whispered to her was a lie and he had simply been trying to steal Estia's secrets.

Then she could end her life without regret.

Jennie kept walking slower, hoping he would find her, hoping at the same time he would not. Her aimless steps stopped in front of the garden of tuberoses. Or what had been a garden. All of them had been pulled up and scattered on the ground, in preparation for new flowers. Looking carefully through the crushed and broken blossoms, she found one that was still intact.

The moment she reached out a hand...

"....."

A small stone fell in front of her feet. Slowly, she looked up.



There was a man sitting on a branch in a tree with his back against the thick trunk, smoking. Exhaling, smoke drifted in front of his solemn face. It seemed natural the way he looked down on her from above. In the darkness, his bright golden eyes stared at her as if he knew why she was walking around the garden, unable to go to her bedroom.

Jennie lowered her eyes and put a solid wall around her heart. This time she hoped this man couldn't reach her emotions.

As soon as Jennie stopped looking at him, Liam dropped his pipe and jumped lightly from the tree.

Despite the considerable height, he landed without a sound. His movements were incredibly agile. As he approached her, she could smell the scent of tobacco.

"Greetings, King of the Kurkans," Jennie said.

Liam smiled bitterly at the cordial tone. His eyes narrowed.

"I guess there are different ways to refuse."

Jennie spoke, still avoiding his eyes.

"It's late," Jennie said, avoiding his eyes. "It's not good for us to be gathered in the garden of the Princess Palace, so...!"

Her words stopped as she inhaled in surprise.

"You don't need to reprimand me." A warm embrace enveloped her tightly. Soon, she heard his voice again. "Let me hold you for a moment, Jennie."

Instantly, tears welled in her eyes and Jennie bit her lip hard. She wanted to hug him and sob uncontrollably. But that was just an impulse. Really, she shouldn't even rest her head on his chest.

But...it seemed like it was all right to lean into that warmth for a moment. A feeling of contentment filled her body. Emotions she had buried resurfaced again. At this moment, she was in the safest place in the world. No one could intimidate her here. She could enjoy total

peace.

Liam embraced her silently, holding her icy body in his arms until it melted in his warmth.

"You've lost a lot of weight since I last saw you."

He covered her cheek with his hand, but she turned her head away as a cold breeze blew against her warmed body. The cold air made her regain her composure, and she slowly parted her lips.

"Go back."

She still didn't make eye contact. She couldn't look at him. She was sure if she did, she couldn't hide her feelings. But Liam paid no attention to her.

"I don't want to," he said, smiling. He ran a hand through her hair and murmured, "Are you choosing Seokjin?"

She felt a tingling in her mouth. The word 'no' was on the tip of her tongue. Tilting his head to the side, Liam shook her lightly.

"I'm leaving tomorrow, don't you have anything to say about it?"

"...From the beginning..." Jennie lifted her head.

"There was never anything between us."

"....."

His eyes narrowed. Jennie looked into those eyes, the most beautiful color she had ever seen in her life.

She imagined the golden sand of the desert as she spoke.

"It's enough that we've enjoyed each other's company so far." Her comment was as hurtful as a dagger. "Or do you want me to pay you for sex? The Kurkans didn't seem so poor."

Liam's mouth twisted.

"If it's about pissing people off, I think you succeed to some extent."

Jennie saw her reflection in his eyes and it was horrible. She didn't like the way she was stomping on his heart, even saying that she would pay him for the sex they'd had, after she'd received so much love and help from him.

She hoped he hated her too.

"Jennie."

*Save me, Liam.*

She swallowed the words that wanted to escape. What exactly did she expect of him? Liam was a King. Asking him to take a puppet princess for his bride would be brazen. Holding back the plea that had risen in her throat, she hardened her expression.

"What is Estia to you?"

This wasn't turning out how she had imagined. The emotions she had silenced for days boiled over as if they had been waiting for this moment. Jennie tried to hide her ragged breathing.

"It's all I have. It's the country I love and the country I must protect." Though her voice was cold, her words faltered a little. "I was born a Princess, so I will die a Princess."

It was hard to bear the emotions growing crazily inside her. Repressing them deeper, Jennie finished what she had to say.

"Don't interfere in my life anymore. I'm sick of this."

Biting her lower lip, she turned away from Liam as if she were fleeing. Her heart ached. It was so hard not to say what she really was thinking. Even though she had managed to hide her true feelings, Jennie felt like a child who had just lied for the first time in their life. She could feel his gaze on her back.

"I'll be back first. I hope the King enjoys his evening walk in moderation, for he will soon have a long journey to make."

As he took the first step, he heard a low murmur.

"Life..." His voice was filled with annoyance, and Jennie shuddered.  
"Yes, that's your life."

She felt an impulse as strong as if she were possessed to turn back, but she clenched her hands and restrained herself, her fingernails digging deep into her palms. The pain and pressure allowed her to keep her body from turning back to him. It was hard to move her legs. They felt stiff. She managed to take a step, and then another.

".....!"

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## Chapter 86

### Chapter 86 - There Is Nowhere To Flee

A sudden force pulled on her shoulder and her body turned around. Jennie caught her breath, looking up at dazzling golden eyes. Liam's face was unperturbed, but his fierce eyes were piercing. The beautiful color she would never look upon again was etched in her memory.

When she belatedly came to her senses and looked away, his large hand grabbed her chin, forcing her to make eye contact. Liam opened his mouth to speak.

"Listen to me carefully, Princess." His low, haunting voice made her feel a little nervous. "The noble life you have as a princess. I'm going to trample and ruin it."

His fingers gently touched her cheek as he whispered, his words embedding themselves deep within her.

"I will make you stop talking like the Princess of Estia..."

It felt like a golden light flashed in her heart.

"There is nowhere to flee."

And with that, Liam was gone, as if she had blinked and he vanished into darkness. Jennie, left alone staring into the emptiness, smiled bitterly.

"....."

She didn't have to run. If he looked for her, all he would find was her corpse. Her eyes went to the tuberoses strewn on the ground before her. Amidst the pile was an intact one, but she couldn't see it now. Gazing at the empty, fertile land, Jennie went slowly back to her bedroom.

Now she was completely alone.

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The night before departing the palace, the Kurkans were busily moving, stowing luggage and completing the duties ordered by the King. In front of the guest palace, a row of carriages and wagons were lined up.

Suddenly all of the Kurkans stopped at the same time, looking in one direction. A man was walking quietly toward them.

"Liam!"

Haban, who had been supervising the loading, ran to greet him, and Genin put down the heavy box she was carrying. All the Kurkans gathered quickly with nervous expressions on their faces, and Morga exchanged glances with Genin and Haban.

"The Princess..." Genin began cautiously.

"She said no. She turned me down splendidly."

Although he spoke nonchalantly, Liam couldn't hide his feelings. He covered his eyes with his hands and a cry of pain escaped.

"...Ha." He removed his hands after a moment to ask, "She seemed very unsteady, are you sure she's all right?"

The King looked unusually vulnerable. Morga blinked in surprise at the question, gaping until Genin nudged him lightly in the side.

"Nothing can be done for now," he said belatedly. "It would be best to get the princess to Kurkan as soon as possible."

"....."

Liam sighed, tapping his chin.

"Genin."

Genin tensed as soon as her name was called, and answered, "All preparations are ready. I and Haban will be leading the two wings."

"Morga."

"We can't remove the tracking spell, but it can be obstructed. I can take care of it as soon as I have the Princess."

"Haban."

"We have the equipment ready. As for the location, it will be on the plains."

He was referring to the plains on the outskirts of the capital, where eulalies grew. Liam looked over the load the Kurkans had diligently packed so far. When he removed the cloth covering the wagon, a rope with an iron hook appeared. A sturdy hook, strong enough for heavy loads.

"We thought we'd use them to tip the carriage over."

"Not bad."

With Haban beside him, Liam lifted the iron hook and pulled on the rope to make sure it was secure.

"She doesn't have to take any responsibility," he muttered. Not really. He didn't care if he was called an evil man. He set the hook back in the wagon and turned to face the Kurkans, smiling coldly.

"So..." His golden eyes glittered. "We're going to kidnap my bride."

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## Chapter 87

### Chapter 87 - You Will Be A King

In the depths of the Queen's Palace, there was a place no one knew about. It had been built by modifying a secret passage known only to the royal family. Cerdina had killed the officials and workers responsible for its construction, ensuring that only she knew it existed.

It was filled with various medicinal herbs, dead animals, and other dubious objects. Taking out ground lizard powder and the eyes of a frog who had died under the full moon, Cerdina weighed the materials on a scale. Once they had been accurately measured, she poured them carefully into a boiling pot. As the liquid changed color, she pulled out a final ingredient: one of Jennie's hairs, which showed like silver thread.

The silver was so beautiful, it looked as if it had been pulled from the moon. Once it was in the pot, the liquid turned a shiny silver. She stirred it with a ladle until it finally turned black.

Cerdina waited thoughtfully for the steam to dissipate. Though this time she had taken Jennie's hair directly, previously she had controlled Countess Melissa to acquire them. Jennie trusted the Countess, who had regularly combed her hair.

Cerdina had easily been able to continue her spell.

Today she made the potion and kept a few more strands of Jennie's hair in a small glass bottle, just in case. But she did not foresee that she would need to use it. The spell was almost finished. The King's hair would suffice for the rest. Cerdina plunged into indescribable ecstasy as she imagined the completion of the spell.

That was the day Jongin would ascend the throne.

The humblest blood would become the greatest, and the arrogant bluebloods would be brought to their knees. It was a great feat that none of her ancestors had ever achieved.



Cerdina's power would be stronger than ever. Her appetite for power and her ambition were insatiable. There was no end to them. She would create the perfect coronation ceremony.

Humming, she poured the black liquid into a wine glass, placed it on a tray, and left the room. But as she entered Jongin's room, she stopped.

The room was a mess. Jongin stood in the center of the chaos, surrounded by broken and shattered objects. His severe injuries had not completely healed. The wrist that had been broken wasn't bandaged. Turning toward Cerdina, he threw his bottle of wine at her. It landed at her feet and shattered at the impact, red wine splashing her feet.

"Is it necessary to give the Princess to Seokjin?"

Cerdina smiled at her son's ruthless behavior.

"Because you are not a King yet."

"....."

Jongin's gaze shuttered, and Cerdina's face hardened when she saw his suffering.

It made her think of the dead Queen. Jennie had inherited her beautiful features. Every time Cerdina saw her, it reminded her of the dead Queen and she would get cranky.

Cerdina had only used Jennie as a tool to incite Jongin's desires, to make him want power and share his mother's ambitions. But even though Cerdina had cunningly covered his eyes and ears until now, Jongin now understood his emotions. Jongin would achieve great things in the future. A simple princess should not represent the end of the road.

"Think again, Jongin."

Cerdina hoped he wouldn't be swayed by a woman.

She wanted to give her son a suitable wife, moderately dumb, who

could produce good offspring. Someone as intelligent as Jennie was hard to handle, and after Cerdina had damaged her so badly with her spells, she had too many flaws to allow her close to Jongin.

Approaching slowly, Cerdina offered him the wineglass.

"As your mother I only want to give you the best," she whispered affectionately.

Jongin snatched the wineglass from her hand and drank the black liquid to the bottom without hesitating. He dropped the empty glass to let it fall by the broken wine bottle, looking fiercely at Cerdina.

"I trust you will keep your promise."

Though her perfect smile faded a little, she regained it as if nothing had happened.

"Of course I will. I will do whatever you want."

*You will be a king, Jongin.*

Imagining the dazzling crown that would soon be placed on her beloved son's head, Cerdina opened her arms to him.

Jongin embraced her. His eyes were filled with a deep displeasure.

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The Kurkans left the Palace of Estia.

Unlike the ostentatious welcome they had received when they arrived, their departure was unceremonious. Early in the morning, under the watchful eyes of the royal knights, they quietly left.

They were not seen by any member of the royal family or by any of the high-status nobles.

Jennie, at the Princess Palace, only received word once they had gone.

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## Chapter 88

### Chapter 88 - Before Leaving

Preparations to travel to the frontier were completed quickly. There wasn't much to be done since Jennie wouldn't be bringing much and she wouldn't be taking her ladies-in-waiting with her. The atmosphere in the palace had not been good since Jongin had been wounded, and Jennie's departure would be as quiet as that of the Kurkans.

On her last day in the palace, Jennie went to see the King. Their relationship had deteriorated so much, she couldn't even remember calling him father. But she thought she should see him again before she died. It wasn't anything to do with the surge of emotions she was feeling because he too was close to his death.

"....."

Jennie looked at the man sitting across from her. His unfocused eyes were not unlike those of her ladies-in-waiting. Before she had still felt he was alive, but lacked the ability to discern things. Now there was not even that. Cerdina no longer needed to hide anything from Jennie. She didn't go to the trouble of restoring even a little of the King's consciousness.

Looking at his silver hair and wrinkled face, Jennie spoke slowly.

"...Why?" Her cold voice was filled with resentment.

"Why did you abandon my mother and let that woman in? I don't understand what good is in her..."

Jennie clenched her fists.

"Do you know what you've done?" She asked the King. She had tried so hard, but it had all been in vain. Jennie's voice faded to a helpless mutter. "Estia is ruined..."

There was no answer. No matter what she said, she was only talking to herself. Jennie looked into the King's empty eyes and stood, feeling

only unhappiness. The people who saw the Princess walking alone without any attendants were bewildered, but Jennie didn't care.

As she walked aimlessly, she unknowingly moved toward the hall of the main palace. It was the place where she and Liam had first met as the Princess of Estia and the King of the Kurkans. There was no activity. The hall was empty and silent. She gazed at the gleaming throne at the end of the hall and the rows of pillars, and then moved on.

The next place she stopped was the conference room. After a quick glance at the place where she had bargained with him, she made her way to the Glory Room.

The well-kept sculptures and paintings looked as beautiful as ever. Walking amidst the storied works of art from the long history of her country, Jennie came to stand in the center of the palace. The beam of light descended from the window in the ceiling, and she stood under it to feel the warmth of the sun, remembering the voice that had told her she looked beautiful.

Passing down the corridor where they had had another conversation some time ago, she stopped at the fountain. She couldn't help smiling at the thought that the seeds he had thrown into the bushes might grow into date palms.

On her way back to the Princess Palace, she felt a chill. Even though the owner of the palace had returned, none of her ladies-in-waiting came to greet her. Jennie walked around the palace, which now lacked any human warmth. In the flower gardens outside, new flowers had been planted in various colors where before there had only been white tuberose.

When she returned to her bedroom, she drew back the curtain carefully, opening the glass door and stepping out onto the balcony. She stood for a long time, clinging to the railing. It felt as if at any moment, she would jump.

But she finally returned to the bed and sat, stroking the white blanket. It was as if she had some feelings lingering. For a while, she stroked the blanket, and then got up and went to her office. Sitting at

her desk, she pulled out a blank sheet of paper. She grabbed a quill and wrote.

### **[Last Will.]**

She finished it in neat calligraphy. She had done it in the hope that there would be no controversy over whether her death was a suicide or a homicide. The contents were brief because she did not have much to say. Putting her signature at the bottom of the page, she stamped it with the seal used in the Princess Palace.

Jennie read it again and stored it in the bottom of a drawer. When she died, she guessed someone might find it if they sorted through her belongings.

After reviewing documents pertaining to the gifts to be distributed to her ladies-in-waiting and other nobles who had helped her, she put them with her last will. Everything was done. Jennie returned to her bedroom and went to bed early.

The day came to leave the Palace of Estia.

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## Chapter 89

### Chapter 89 - Plains Outside The Capital

Jennie watched the sun rising through the window, peeking through to slowly push away the darkness. As soon as it had fully cleared the horizon, she ran to her bedroom door.

"....."

But she hesitated then; it was strangely difficult to grab the doorknob. Only after she heard a knock from the other side could she open it.

"...Princess?"

Countess Melissa had come to attend her in the early hours of the morning, and was surprised as Jennie hugged her.

"Lady!"

With her arms around Countess Melissa, Jennie looked at the ladies-in-waiting behind her. Their eyes were clear and filled with confusion as they looked at Jennie, and she closed her eyes and buried her face in the Countess's shoulder.

Everything had returned to normal.

"...I'm sorry I surprised you."

Jennie took a step back, smiling slightly, and the ladies-in-waiting looked regretful. They thought she was acting this way because she would be leaving them, and their eyes filled with tears. Reassuring them, Jennie went to get dressed for the last time at the Princess Palace.

The goals she had dedicated her life to had collapsed. She had been sold to old Seokjin to achieve ends that were not hers, for benefits she had not wanted. It was a tragic end for a princess who had devoted herself to her country and the royal family, only to be betrayed by both.

But she would have her revenge. A revenge that would leave a stain on the honor of the royal family Cerdina had conquered, and that would finally set Jennie free.

Cerdina had probably not been able to cast a spell on Seokjin. It was likely she wanted to use Jennie to steal confidential information from him. But Jennie wouldn't let Cerdina have her way. Seokjin would be enraged when his new wife—who was certainly impure-committed suicide.

After she had prepared to leave, she had tea in the lobby of the palace, waiting for the final processes to be completed. Finally, Count Valtein arrived.

"May the light shine upon Estia." Count Valtein greeted her courteously, looking as somber as someone going to a funeral home. "Princess, this is your marriage certificate."

Jennie spread the paper on a table with trembling hands, but took a quill and signed it without hesitating.

### **[Leah De Estia]**

The words she wrote on the paper were as clear as her determination. Behind her, her ladies-in-waiting began to cry. But Jennie was indifferent. She remembered the gifts she had left them, and hoped they would be some comfort to the ladies and nobles who would grieve at the news of her death.

"Stop. I'm already long overdue," she said, shaking off their clinging hands. Just as she was about to climb into her carriage, she heard a loud call.

"Jennie!"

Jennie looked back to see silver hair and smiled. The thought of not having to see Jongin anymore made her give a genuine smile. Jongin looked as if he had been about to call again and smiled as he saw her looking. But his smile faded when he saw the haughtiness in her face.

"The day I ascend the throne, the first thing I will do is bring you back."

Even his last words to her were threatening. Jennie didn't answer as she climbed into her carriage.

Sitting straight upright, the carriage door closed behind her and the wheels began to turn. She watched the palace behind her receding. It was finally over. But she was not calm. Her mind was chaotic.

She missed him.

Jennie sat back in her chair and tried to clear her mind of the complicated thoughts. Instead, she tried to imagine only the eternal rest that waited for her.

But it wasn't easy. The carriage heading towards Seokjin territory entered the plains outside the capital, and Jennie struggled to get rid of the man that occupied her mind.

They advanced through the fields of eulalies, with royal knights surrounding the carriage.

In the distance, there was the sound of a battle horn.

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## Chapter 90

### Chapter 90 — My Light

*The memory of that day was vivid. It was so ingrained, it could never fade from Liam's mind.*

*Trapped in overwhelming darkness in a hole where he could not even stretch his limbs, the only way out was a small, round wooden door in the ceiling.*

*That was the place used to teach obedience. It was too cruel for a boy. He couldn't differentiate even the flow of time. There was not a glass of water or a slice of bread. Heavy chains held his limbs down and hurt his skin, where untreated wounds rotted, darkening with pus and crawling with maggots.*

*His mouth had been gagged so he couldn't bite his tongue, and worsened the thirst that burned his throat. The thirst was a more terrible sensation than the hunger in his empty stomach. Gradually, his determination to keep his honor as a desert warrior crumbled before such pain. But every time he was tempted to bend and swear obedience, his anguish was unbearable.*

*Though he longed for death, the life force of Kurkans was incredibly tenacious.*

*I want to die. Please let me die. God, let me die, Liam prayed fervently.*

*But his prayer went unanswered. Little Kurkan, abandoned by his own people, ignored even by God. And when he had lost all hope and his will was broken, a light descended.*

*The wooden door that had seemed as if it would never move had opened. Sunlight entered. Dazzling silver hair. Purple eyes that sparkled like amethysts.*

He hadn't understood it in the past, but he did now. He had fallen in love at first sight. Liam regretted the time he had wasted, not knowing. He would do his best now, for that reason.

"....."

His face was expressionless as he looked ahead over the plains. Densely filled with eulalies, they were so vast that there was no end in sight. A strong wind blew over them and the eulalies moved in a wave. From the sky, a hawk screeched, and Haban looked up at the bird in the firmament and spoke.

"Liam."

Liam looked back to see the Kurkans behind him, lined up on their horses. Each wore a long cloth that hid half their face. Looking into their piercing eyes, he pulled the cloth covering his own face down to his chin.

"Come on."

The horses lifted their forelegs, neighing as they surged into a gallop. The sound of their hooves pounding the plains was like a drum. The eyes of their riders shone extraordinarily bright with the euphoria of a battle. The bestial instincts in their veins made their bodies boil.

A short distance into the eulalies, their objective was in sight. The flag of the Royal Family of Estia waved magnificently, and Liam's mouth twisted. In spite of all her dedication, no one in Estia had saved their Princess. It seemed ridiculous to him that they would only watch the sacrifice she was making with her blood and her tears. They were disgusting.

"Attack!" He commanded. Haban grabbed the ram's horn at his waist and blew a battle call, the loud sound echoing across the vast plain. The Kurkans had split up to advance from multiple directions, and the other groups responded with their own horns, the sounds that signaled the start of battle.

"Ambush!" The royal knight shouted. "Increase speed!"

The knights were only belatedly aware of their pursuers. Chasing fleeing prey was what Kurkans did best.

The knights were quickly surrounded, their shouts and the sound of swords being drawn mingling. The eulalies were stained with hot

blood as the knights resisted desperately, and the coachmen tried to escape. All of it was in vain. Iron hooks flew from all directions like arrows and caught the carriage.

"These barbarians...!" The coachman shouted, waving his whip frantically.

Those were his last words. A curved dagger pierced his heart and the carriage lurched, out of control.

The ropes tightened and the carriage tipped over.

With his curved sword, Liam slashed the neck of an approaching knight. There was a cruel smile on his face. It was difficult to control his nature at the sight of blood, and his instincts would only become more frantic with more killing.

His golden eyes glittered from a mask of red blood. A knight who met his eyes backed away in fright, but a rope caught him by the neck and dragged him from his horse. The one-sided slaughter continued, and Liam's body was stained with blood.

Finally, he looked to the overturned carriage, where a small woman was struggling to push open the damaged door. He couldn't help smiling. She should be frightened, but she wasn't hiding. Instead she was trying to get out and look around to understand her situation. It suited her.

There were no more obstacles blocking his path.

Slowly, he led his horse toward her, and Jennie's eyes widened. Her beautiful purple eyes trembled.

"Why...?"

Her silvery eyelashes, her thick, finely curved lips, her soft voice...all very charming.

He couldn't wait any longer. He grabbed her and held her in his arms. The moment he held her slender body, her soft, sweet scent reached his nose. It was a scent that soothed even his violent nature. A feeling of complete contentment filled his body.

My light, my salvation.

My bride.

"Don't you remember?" Liam smiled brightly, unable to contain his growing joy. "Didn't I say I'd ruin your life?"

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## Chapter 91

### Chapter 91 — Let Me Go

Jennie was leaving.

Jongin stared as the carriage pulled away, feeling a heartbreaking mixture of emotions. Though he knew he had to wait, he wanted to run and stop the carriage immediately. The thought of Jennie spending her wedding night with Seokjin made flames erupt in his heart. But Jongin restrained himself. He didn't just want to take her body.

He wanted her heart. Every time she had looked at that barbarian king with her eyes filled with emotion and affection, it tormented him unbearably. He wished she would look at him the way she had looked at Liam. That she would whisper shyly to him with flushed cheeks and loving eyes.

If he could have her heart, he could give up her virginity. He also thought that after she slept with that nasty old man, then she would be much more willing to have sex with him.

Jongin had heard that Seokjin had bad taste in bed.

There were rumors that he had bought many prostitutes that looked like Jennie, then treated them harshly. If Jongin let her suffer for a while and then rescued her...

It seemed like a good idea.

In only a short time, he would put on the crown, and claim everything that was rightfully his.

Jongin left the sad ladies-in-waiting behind and entered the masterless Princess Palace. He wanted to walk through it before the traces of Jennie faded completely. Walking down the silent corridor, he opened the doors to observe each space. The living room, the study, guest bedrooms, the storage room where her clothes and accessories were kept...

His footsteps stopped in front of the office, and he entered as if he were its owner. Her faint scent lingered in the clean, orderly space. Jongin sat down in the desk chair and fiddled with Jennie's quill.

Unconsciously, he opened a drawer, and his face paled. There was an envelope sealed with the wax seal and something written in the corner.

### **[Last Will.]**

The envelope shook, and he realized his hands were trembling. Tearing open the envelope, he quickly read the single page, and then all the documents that had been placed beside it.

They explained how Jennie's goods were to be divided between the ladies-in-waiting of the Princess Palace, and the nobles that had followed her. Given how painstakingly she had written down what she was giving to each person, he couldn't help cursing.

"Damn it...!"

Tearing up her will and the documents, Jongin stormed out of the office. As soon as he exited the palace, he saw knights gathered nearby. His attendant had been waiting with the carriage turned away from the knights and hurried over to Jongin.

"Something terrible has happened! The barbarians attacked the Princess's wedding procession!"

Jongin felt something snap inside him.

"...The Princess," Jongin said between his teeth. The attendant didn't understand the low growl, and when he didn't answer, Jongin grabbed him by the collar and shouted, "The Princess!!!"

"She's been kidnapped...!"

Jongin let the man go and untied a horse from the carriage.

"Tell my mother." Mounting the horse, he said coldly, "I will chase the beasts myself."

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As soon as they confirmed their King had his bride in his arms, the Kurkans sounded the battle horns to retreat. All of them stopped fighting and galloped swiftly away, leaving the corpses and blood-soaked eulalies behind. Only when they reached the edge of the plains did the relentless gallop end.

Other Kurkans had been waiting in advance. Morga was waiting near a carriage of smooth, unpatterned ebony wood and quickly approached Liam.

"Liam, over here!"

Liam slid off his horse as Jennie struggled over his shoulder.

"Let me go! Let me go!" Jennie punched him in the face with her small fist, but it was useless. Liam only stared at her, and when he saw that her hand was reddening, he grabbed her wrists to stop her from hurting herself.

He bundled Jennie into the carriage, which had carefully padded seats and cushions, as well as some blankets. She quickly scurried to the far side of the carriage, breathing fast. For a moment, she and Liam were frozen, staring at each other. Morga's voice interrupted them as he followed them.

"You have to give it to her right now."

Liam accepted the small glass bottle filled with a strange, dark red liquid.

Jennie refused to open her mouth, but Liam grabbed her jaw and forced her mouth open, pouring the liquid inside. She tried to spit it out, but his large hand covered her nose and mouth. She scratched at his hand with her fingernails, but he didn't move.

His other hand closed gently around her throat, rubbing. In the end, she had to swallow the liquid in her mouth, and only when he was sure that she had swallowed it all did he lower his hand.

Jennie coughed.

"Why...Why did I..."

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## Chapter 92

### Chapter 92 — Stop

Jennie's voice cracked, hoarse from screaming.

Liam brought out a silk rope to tie her wrists and ankles together.

"The King of the Kurkans is carrying out a bride kidnapping," he explained nonchalantly.

Her heart dropped, but the conversation would not continue for much longer. She felt weak, probably due to whatever liquid he had made her drink. Her vision blurred and her consciousness rapidly faded.

"Please... don't do this..." Jennie muttered helplessly.

Liam stared at her.

"You can hate me, Jennie," he whispered softly.

Her trembling eyelids closed. For a while, he held her body and then carefully put her to bed in the carriage. To keep her from being shaken around, he wrapped her with cushions and blankets, then slid out of the carriage and shut the door.

The Kurkans galloped on. They continued relentlessly, only stopping before the exhausted horses collapsed, long after the sun went down and darkness spread over the plain. Heat steamed from the horses' bodies. They had traveled a long way without rest and were taken to stables to be fed and watered.

At Genin's instructions, the Kurkans brought out new horses. They had prepared this base beforehand. As they quickly changed horses, Haban looked up at the sky and whistled in three times. The screech of a hawk echoed in response, and a moment later, a large hawk landed on his shoulder.

As Haban stroked the bird and gave it chunks of meat, Genin untied the small paper tied to its leg and read it, frowning. She destroyed

the paper and informed Liam.

"The royal family has begun a pursuit. According to the message, the Crown Prince himself is leading it."

"Sooner than I expected." He frowned. He had bribed nobles to learn the route of the wedding procession, then altered their reports with lies. It would take the Kurkans three weeks to reach the frontier. They couldn't avoid pursuit from the royal family, but they had to reach the desert before Seokjin learned of the situation.

And there was the problem with Jennie. According to Morga, the person who had brainwashed her could easily track her down. The potion they had made her drink would help avoid it, and Morga was using magic to interfere with the Queen's spells.

"What about matters related to the Queen, Morga?"

"At the moment you don't have to worry, but from now on I'd better stay close to the Princess," Morga replied, wiping sweat from his forehead.

"All right, do so." Liam gave his permission and moved toward the other Kurkans. They would make a final inspection before departing.

Morga approached the carriage with a deep sigh. He didn't have the nerve to open the carriage door.

Genin watched him stare at it regretfully and finally opened the door for him, and even helped him into the carriage in a show of solidarity.

"Thank you, Genin."

"You don't have to thank me for this. Take care of her, Morga."

Morga nodded solemnly, but as soon as the door closed, he sighed again, crumbling onto a seat. The Queen's power was stronger than he expected. It was like torture, trying to block it alone.

The carriage began to move again soon after, and from then on, they would continue without stopping until they reached the next base.

Wiping away sweat with his sleeves, Morga looked at the Princess.

She was sleeping, bound with silk rope and wrapped in blankets and cushions. If the potion worked correctly and hindered the Queen's spells, she would sleep until they reached the desert. As he calculated the time remaining, he pulled a crystal orb from an inner pocket over his chest. Black smoke swirled inside the glowing orb. It was a tool he didn't use often, but under the circumstances, he was forced to pull it out.

"Let's go with this..." Morga muttered, placing a rosemary leaf on the Princess's forehead. He saw the binding on her wrists as he bent over her. They had restrained her to keep her from jumping out of the moving carriage if she woke up, and he looked with pity at the slender wrists. If the potion was working, it should be okay to untie them. But the instant he untied it, something happened.

".....!"

With a loud noise, a crack appeared in the crystal orb and Morga slumped over, nauseous. Although everything was spinning before his eyes, the first thing he did was check on the Princess. Her closed eyelids slowly lifted, revealing her beautiful purple eyes. They stared straight ahead, unfocused, and then slowly turned toward Morga. Unconsciously, he held his breath as he looked at her.

Her small body rose and her white hand grabbed Morga's neck, and goosebumps rose all over his body as she tried to strangle him. Morga leaped up and slid the curtains back, punching through the carriage window to shout.

"Stop! Stop!"

He had made a mistake. Even though they were being pursued, they had to stop immediately. Morga shouted again, this time so loudly the veins rose in his neck.

"Stop the carriage now! Quickly!"

It wasn't just brainwashing. She had already become the Queen's puppet.



## Chapter 93

### Chapter 93 — Immunity To Spells

From the moment Morga saw the Princess in the forest, he knew her condition was serious. Normally, spells were not outwardly revealed. Even sorcerers couldn't easily discern if someone was under a spell, unless they used some potion.

But in the Princess's case, it was different. He could see the sinister black smoke hovering around her body with very little effort. There were so many layers of wicked and powerful spells, that even if the Queen had tried to hide them, she couldn't. Morga had confirmed that the most powerful spell on the Princess was brainwashing, but he had made an error in judgment. The Queen had gone beyond brainwashing. She had turned the Princess into a puppet, then covered it up between layers of spells.

"In her current state, she has lost control of her body," Morga explained. The galloping group had stopped and he knelt on the ground with his head bowed, his legs shaking. "The Queen cannot be prevented from tracking us. A more powerful spell must be cast. It's all my fault..."

"Get up, Morga. Now is not the time for reproaches." Liam sighed. "I know you did your best."

Morga had to hold back his tears at the warm words, and pressed his lips together. Haban, in the back of the crowd of Kurkans, laughed until Genin hit him.

"What do you want me to do?"

"Please buy me some time."

At the request, Liam looked at Genin, and she frowned.

"Assuming they know our location, if we stop any longer at this place, we will be overtaken by the pursuit of the royal family," she said, and pondered for a moment before giving her opinion. "Why

don't we leave Morga and the Princess here, while we go back to deal with the pursuers?"

"Liam should be with me," Morga quickly interjected. "I need his blood."

"...Is it because of my constitution?"

"Yes."

Haban immediately raised his hand.

"I think Genin and I will be enough. Please give me about thirty warriors."

The operation would consist of each of them leading fifteen warriors to ambush the pursuers. Humans did not have good vision at night. A surprise attack should be enough to win.

"We will surely get satisfactory results," Haban said, with a twinkle in his eye.

Genin raised her hand.

"Can the Crown Prince be killed?" she asked.

"Of course not!" exclaimed Morga. He explained that they shouldn't until they understood all the spells on the Princess. Haban elbowed Genin for the suggestion.

"Crown Prince, I could break him with one blow," she muttered, frowning. But she nodded to herself.

She would be careful not to kill him. As soon as the decision was made, they proceeded immediately. Genin and Haban turned back the way they had come, accompanied by the thirty Kurkans they had selected.

The remaining Kurkans set up a defensive formation in preparation for any surprises, and Morga and Liam headed back to the carriage.

"....."

Liam's expression saddened as he opened the carriage door, and Morga caught his breath as he watched the King's reaction. The Princess had been tied up again and was staring at Jennie, her bright purple eyes unfocused.

Liam's teeth clenched and his hand tightened on the carriage door until veins popped, threatening to shatter the precious ebony wood. Carefully, he took the Princess in his arms and drew her out of the carriage. Laying a thick blanket on the ground, he set Jennie on it and untied her as Morga began his preparations.

Studying the shape of the moon and the position of the stars, he took out a potion he had already prepared, then cut his finger with a dagger and dripped the blood into the bottle. Closing the bottle with a stopper, he shook the potion to mix it.

"I have something to tell you," he said. "What we're going to do now...is really a last resort."

There was a temporary method of forcibly twisting spells, but it was normally only used on those under a mild spell due to the severity of the reaction. The magnitude of these spells meant that in fact, he might even die.

But he would try in spite of this, because of Liam. Kurkans had a high resistance to spells, but Liam had immunity to them. If they used Liam's blood, they could avoid the Queen's eyes until they reached the desert.

"It won't pose a threat to her life if we use your blood, but it will be a harsh method for the Princess." Morga drew out the cracked crystal orb and a brazier. Shaking juniper branches over the brazier, he dripped a drop of the potion onto it, mixed with his own blood. As soon as the potion touched the brazier, the smoke darkened and thickened.

"She will feel a lot of pain. She will writhe violently. Make sure you restrain her properly."

The most convenient thing to do would have been to leave her tied up, but the ropes would burn her skin when she struggled. Liam held

Jennie in his arms like a doll. Morga looked at them and spoke sternly.

"Then let us begin. First give her this..."

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## Chapter 94

### Chapter 94 — Ambush

Morga gave Liam the potion that he had just tested in the brazier. The Princess was in no condition to drink it on her own, so Liam poured it in his mouth and kissed her, trickling it little by little into her mouth. Her limp body tightened a little. When it was gone, he opened her lips to make sure she had swallowed it.

Without hesitating, he bit his finger, breaking the skin so blood gushed out. Slipping his bleeding finger into the Princess's small mouth, he rubbed his blood on her tongue and made her swallow it.

".....!"

The Princess's half-closed eyes fluttered. Morga stoked the brazier, sending out thick clouds of smoke. Jennie shook her head, trying to push his finger out of her mouth, and even bit down hard, but Liam didn't relent. Instead, he pushed it deeper.

Tears began to fill her eyes.

"Ahhh!!" Her scream pierced the night. Her small body shuddered, almost convulsing. Liam held her tightly as she writhed at the excruciating pain, biting and scratching frantically at him.

"It hurts, it hurts, it hurts too much...!" She cried desperately, sobbing as she pleaded, "Ahh, kill me, just kill me..."

But the hands holding her body stayed firm, and Liam slid another finger into her mouth to keep her from biting her tongue.

"No, Jennie." He felt pain, but it wasn't physical pain. Her bites and scratches were like tickles to him. "I'll let you do what you want, but not that."

He tried to calm her down, pampering her more. He rubbed his face against her tearstained cheek, whispering.

"Don't say such things..."

Liam looked fragile as he held the Princess in his arms and kept whispering to her. Morga's eyes trembled as he watched, and he lowered his head.

"....."

Morga knew this attachment was not superficial, but Liam's feelings were much more intense than he had imagined. Among the Kurkans, the wolf tribe was said to give their whole heart when choosing a mate.

But Morga hadn't expected Liam to act that way.

The King of the Kurkans had never been defeated, Morga thought. But he might be coming to know the feeling because of the Princess.

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Perched at the top of a tree, Haban looked into the distance. He could see a cloud of dust from a large group galloping. Squinting as he watched them carefully, Haban spoke to Genin, seated below him.

"Genin, do you remember the first time you met Liam?"

"Of course I remember."

Haban of the cat tribe and Genin of the wolf tribe had been selected as escorts for the former King of the Kurkans. As they worked alongside him, they had to watch his evil deeds. Eventually they had been unable to stand it, and fled, but they had been quickly captured and imprisoned. Liam had appeared just as they had been ordered to choose between loyalty or death.

"I have never seen a being so powerful and beautiful."

"Also dangerous," said Haban.

Genin nodded. Though Liam often smoked tobacco to suppress it, he had an unbridled, wild instinct that he could not hide.

"But it's different when he's with the Princess," she said. When he was with Jennie, Liam was always calm, as if he were in the most

peaceful place.

"I think the Princess is the perfect companion." Haban's lips curved as he looked at the group galloping closer and closer. Before hundreds of knights, he showed no fear. Despite the obvious numerical advantage, his eyes sparkled. Fighting and killing were essential to Kurkans.

"The Crown Prince is in the lead." Genin said, watching the approaching group intently. "That guy has tormented the Princess too much. We can't let him take her away."

At her words, Haban focused his eyes on the prince at the head of the knights. As he watched him charging onward, Haban smiled deviously.

"We should treat her properly. She's ours now."

"You're right." Measuring the distance to confirm Jongjn was in her reach, Genin raised her bow. "She is no longer the Princess of Estia."

Slowly, she drew the bowstring. The muscles in her arms swelled as she took aim and released her arrow at the right moment. As the arrow shot away, she spoke, her face expressionless.

"She will be the Queen of the Kurkans."

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## Chapter 95

### Chapter 95 — You Know Nothing

She had a strange dream. It was a simple dream of suffering, burning pain, incredibly vivid. She wondered if that would have been the sensation she would have felt if her body was burning in hellfire.

If there had been a knife in reach, she would have stabbed herself in the heart. The pain was so unbearable that all she could was cry and beg for death.

Someone held her, constantly whispering to her. She didn't remember what he was saying. But his gentle warmth and affectionate whispers were pleasant.

She clung to them through the endless pain, and when it finally stopped, she passed out.

It seemed like some time had passed. She wasn't sure how long, but she had wandered for a long time in the dark, at least a few days, before she finally came to her senses. Jennie awoke with a slight headache, frowning.

"....."

Dumbfounded, she looked around. She was in an unfamiliar place. It was not Estia. It seemed she was in a barracks. The floor was covered with exotic patterned rugs and the bed Jennie was lying on was covered in a fancy patterned cloth. She pushed aside the blanket and stood up.

Or she tried.

A pained sound escaped her. She remembered drinking a potion and losing her sanity, and feeling as if her body was crumbling apart.

Jennie sat up in bed and looked around again. There was a cluster of branches hanging on the wall over the head of the bed. In one corner of the barrack was a large brazier. She was accustomed to the scent it was emanating; it was the smell of the tobacco Liam often smoked.

She sat, dazed.

A shudder wracked her. Memories appeared one after the other, as disordered as if someone had cut them into pieces. There was a sharp pain in her head, and Jennie clutched it in both hands. It felt as if her skull was going to crack.

"Ahh...!"

She curled up with a groan of pain. The canvas door of the barracks cracked open and sunlight illuminated the dim space.

"Oh, Jennie!!!"

A warmth enveloped her body like a solid shield. Jennie clung desperately to it until her labored breathing calmed and her headache slowly subsided.

After a long while, she raised her head, and before her eyes stood the man that even in her dreams she always wanted to see. Jennie's lips parted.

"Liam..."

Startled by her own cracked voice, she shut her mouth. Liam poured water from a pitcher on the bedside table into a glass and brought it to her lips, and she quickly drank. She felt refreshed. Even the slight, lingering headache was completely gone.

It was then that she reflected on what all of it meant.

"How long have I been asleep?" That was the first thing she wanted to confirm.

"It's been three weeks."

Three weeks? Was that possible? Seeing her surprise, Liam's eyes narrowed.

"Of course, normally a person would have died," he said quietly. It was sorcery that had kept her alive. Jennie's lips parted.

"So, this is..."

"It's the desert. We're on our way to Kurkan, and it looks like we'll be there in three days at the latest."

Jennie looked at him, shocked, but said nothing.

With difficulty, she pushed him away. She wanted to confirm it with her own eyes, but as soon as she tried to get out of bed, something pulled on her left wrist with a metallic sound.

There was a thick leather cuff on her wrist, lined with soft cloth inside. A thin chain connected it to the bed to restrict her movement.

"...What is this?"

She was so bewildered by this barbaric treatment that she was almost speechless. Jennie bit her lower lip hard.

"Release me immediately and send me back to Estia," she said calmly. But Liam ignored her request. He only laughed shortly.

"Where to? To Seokjin's territory?" His gaze was flat, and he spoke coldly. "Even if the kidnapped bride returns, she won't have a very good time. Surely they will say that you are not pure and they will stone you mercilessly. Isn't that how they behave in Estia?"

His sarcasm angered her.

"That's none of your business!" Jennie shouted. She saw that his golden eyes had darkened, but she couldn't stop herself. Her voice filled with misery. "You know nothing..."

It was how she had felt when she had decided to die. It had no been an easy decision, but she had chosen death because there was no other way out. She covered her face with her hands. She felt like crying. Liam had never left her, which made her so happy and so miserable at the same time. Because she knew what could happen.

It wasn't too late. She had to go back. She was about to beg him to send her away, when she heard his low voice.

"I don't know what, Jennie." His tone was unusually quiet. Jennie lowered her hands, her shoulders shaking.

Liam's eyes were icier than ever. He was barely controlling his anger.

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## Chapter 96

### Chapter 96 — Your Fears

"Tell me what I don't know," said Liam. His next question was not one that she could easily answer.

"When did you become a puppet under the Queen's spells?"

".....!"

Jennie stiffened. She almost forgot to breathe.

Belatedly, she responded.

"Did you deliberately say cruel things to me?" Liam continued before she could properly formulate her question. "Or did you intend to commit suicide, even thinking of spending your first night with someone as disgusting as Seokjin?"

Slowly, he brought his face closer to whispers, and whispered warningly.

"What don't I know, Jennie."

"....."

She couldn't say anything. All the secrets she had tried to hide were revealed, and he was barely containing his anger. She remembered their conversation that last night in the palace. Even then, Liam had been angry. Emotion welled up in her and her body reacted before her mind could identify it.

Tears filled her eyes, and Jennie let out a sob as the tears flowed, staining her white cheeks.

"No, I'm not angry with you..." Liam said stiffly, uncharacteristically embarrassed.

But the tears didn't stop. Instead of speaking, he just carefully held her, and Jennie could no longer hold back. She sobbed aloud. She



had wanted to do it right. She wanted to be a perfect princess. But she had failed in her last duty, in spite of all her well-laid plans. She had taken it for granted that she would succeed, and chosen death calmly and without fear.

"The Queen..."

But death was not what she really wanted. The hard shell around her shattered.

"She said, that I, I would strangle you, and that, that I would stab you in the heart, with a knife... That I'm going to kill you..." Jennie fought to get the words out as she tried to hold back her sobs. "I, I don't want you to...I didn't want you to hate me..."

There was no end to the tears. She was letting out all the anguish that had built up for so long, and she cried so hard her face reddened. Looking at her, Liam's lips trembled as if he wanted to speak, but he desisted and only tightened his arms around her.

She clung to him as she told him all of the secrets she had hidden.

"That, that woman, my ladies-in-waiting at the Princess Palace, she turned them into p-puppets..." Completely broken, her deepest feelings escaped. "I'm so afraid, Liam..."

Her body trembled with the intensity of her emotions. As she soaked his chest with tears, Liam silently hugged her, stroking her back. Only after she had begun to calm down did he finally speak softly.

"Listen, Jennie."

She looked up. His eyes looked a little sad, an emotion that didn't fit a man with no regrets in this world. Slowly, he brought his lips closer to her eyelids.

"You can strangle me and stab me in the heart." Jennie bit her lower lip hard. Liam kissed her gently again and again, as if he wanted to wipe away her tears. "I'm not going to die because of that, so I don't care. And..." With a deep sigh, he gently kissed the bridge of Jennie's nose and whispered. "I couldn't hate you."

"Oh, how..."

With those words, all her terrible thoughts disappeared like melting snow. Sheer relief sent out a fresh flow of tears. Liam had thought they had finally begun to subside, and didn't know what to do with the new flood. The normally eloquent man couldn't say anything, as if he had lost his tongue.

He just held Jennie silently.

Leaning against him, she cried with all her strength. It had been a long time since she had been able to cry so freely. It was almost the first time she had ever cried openly, rather than quietly in the corner of her bedroom.

How much had she cried? It felt as if she only stopped when she finally ran out of tears. Liam kissed and caressed her the whole time.

"Jennie," he said softly.

She looked up at him, her wet eyelashes fluttering. Liam met her eyes directly.

"If you come back..." He whispered slowly, "You'll really die this time."

She felt an eerie sensation inside her chest. She knew he wasn't lying to try to hold her back. There was no doubt what Cerdina would do. Even if she didn't kill her, it might leave her in the same condition as the King.

"I'll free you from the spells somehow. Please..." Liam laid his forehead gently against hers and rubbed her nose with his. "Stay with me in the desert."

She'd heard it several times before. Jennie blinked, her eyelashes brushing his cheek. In this place, where even their breath mingled, he waited for her response.

Nothing had been resolved. She could still put him in danger. But Liam said he would take care of that.

The man before her could definitely survive. He would protect her no matter what threat or danger came her way. She wanted to believe him.

All this time, she had forced her lips to speak words contrary to the wishes of her heart. Finally, she could tell the truth.

"I will..." Hesitating, she carefully kissed his lips and then withdrew. His eyes widened. Looking into those golden eyes, their pupils dilated, she continued, "...I will stay at your si...."

But she didn't finish. Liam gripped the the back of her neck and brought their lips together eagerly. A hot tongue entered her mouth and licked every part of her, rubbing over each of her teeth, stroking tenaciously over her soft palate. A moan escaped her.

"Ah..."

At her little moan of pleasure, his kisses only intensified. Her body slowly fell backward at his ardor and soon she was lying on the bed with Liam on top of her, kissing her hungrily. His hands kept caressing her. He touched her beautiful hair, stroked her cheeks, massaged her shoulders. She was immersed in the torrent of affection she was receiving.

She could barely hold onto his shoulders. She could feel the firm muscles under the palms of her hands, and she ran them along his sturdy collarbones and hard neck, reaching to embrace his thick body. The chain dangled beside her outstretched hand.

"Jennie, Jennie..." In a low voice he repeated her name over and over. She shuddered every time she said it. A strange sensation tingled in her lower abdomen. When she lifted her lips unconsciously, Liam slid his arms behind her and hugged her tightly to him, as if he had been expecting it. Their minds clouded as they continued kissing passionately.

Suddenly, she felt a warmth against her thighs. Now she knew exactly what that was, hardening. Liam didn't try to hide his excitement. He pressed his manhood against one of her thighs and Jennie unconsciously rubbed herself against the thigh thigh between

her legs. As a moan of pleasure escaped her, Liam frowned and lifted his head.

"Ahh...A problem may occur if this continues." He gently bit her cheek, which was tinged as red as a ripe peach. "Have you ever heard that a beast and a Kurkan have the ability to control themselves?"

She shook her head and he smiled, licking her lips.

"If we continue, with the current condition of your body..." He murmured. But in spite of his words, it wasn't easy for him to withdraw. With a disappointed expression, he kissed her face and neck and shoulders all over. She didn't reject his kisses.

Deep in her heart, she wanted to pretend it wasn't true, and finish what they had begun. But she knew better than anyone that her body wasn't in normal condition. She didn't know what damage could be done if she had sex with Liam.

Liam bit and sucked her for a long time before he rose to grab a cotton cloth. As he wiped her face and body, he suddenly stopped. His eyes fell on her wrist.

"....."

Quickly, he removed the leather cuff. Despite the loose grip and the soft cloth inside the leather, a red mark remained on her wrist. It was nothing serious, and looked like it would heal quickly. Liam looked at the reddened wrist and lifted it to his lips.

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## Chapter 97

### Chapter 97 — Appetite

There was no way he would send Jennie back to Estia, even if it made her hate him. But now that she had decided to stay by his side, Liam didn't see any reason to keep her tied up. Liam kissed her wrist.

"First, you must eat," he said. "You have slept for a long time, so I will bring light food."

Liam exited the hut and immediately returned with a tray filled with food. But perhaps because he considered Jennie a patient, this time he didn't bring food piled in high layers today. Jennie laughed inside.

Liam sat in the chair beside Jennie's bed and organized the food one course at a time. First, he placed some hot porridge before her, and then lined up the courses to follow in a line as she ate bit by bit.

Jennie had been smiling as she watched Liam cutting tender veal into small pieces, but she suddenly darkened as memories came to her mind. From an early age, when her appetite had been at its peak, Cerdina had regulated her food. Jennie had eaten in Cerdina's company at least once every two days, and every time it made her sick to her stomach.

Eating was extremely stressful.

Cerdina had taught her a strict etiquette for eating. If Jennie made the slightest mistake, Cerdina would stop eating immediately and hit her with a stick on the part of her arm hidden by the sleeve of her dress.

And when Jennie was too hungry and tried to eat more, Cerdina would laugh scornfully and point out the flaws in her body, pinching the flesh of her belly and thighs, even though Jennie had a normal constitution as a child.

*—I don't think you can currently consider yourself the Princess of Estia, Jennie.*

Cerdina's gaze was cold as she told Jennie that she must always have a dignified appearance.

*—Do you want to hear people saying that the stepmother made a mistake in raising her stepdaughter?*

Then Jennie would have to plead with her, begging to be forgiven, saying that she had made a mistake and wouldn't eat anymore. Some people had taken pity on Jennie and had tried to give her food in secret, but all were expelled from the palace after brutal torment.

The cycle repeated itself several times and after she saw what Cerdina had done to the victims, Jennie began to refrain from eating on her own. She was even more careful because she feared the Countess Melissa, the only person she could trust, would be expelled.

As long as Jennie restrained herself, everyone would be at peace.

She felt unpleasant as she ate the porridge, and put down the spoon. She couldn't eat anymore. It felt as if she had suddenly become full. When she handed him back the half-eaten bowl of porridge, Liam frowned.

"Don't tell me you're done."

"I'm full." Jennie hesitated for a moment, then spoke quietly. "I'd like to eat more, but...I can't. Maybe it's because I haven't eaten in a long time."

Liam was silent. His eyes glowed brightly, but any hint of danger quickly faded. He didn't try to coax her any further, just took the food away, and then came back to hug Jennie tightly.

Even though she hadn't eaten much, his warmth made her feel full.

"Let's get some fresh air," Liam said as he stroked her hair. "I want to show you something."

Carrying her in his arms, his big hand pushed open the canvas door of the barrack. Jennie gasped as they passed from darkness into light, a scorching sun and golden sand as vast as the sea.

It was the desert.

"Oh..."

The exclamation of amazement escaped her. It was truly a landscape to admire. The endless sand dunes were far more beautiful than she had imagined from the few lines of description she had read in a book.

She couldn't hide her excitement. Her eyes sparkled as Liam laid his hand on her head to shade her. Jennie was enthralled, looking at the landscape.

"Let me down, Liam!" She cried, and then realized how loud she had shouted and lowered her voice. "I want to walk on the sand."

Liam laughed and kissed Jennie's cheek. "I can't, it's too hot."

Jennie was still barefoot, having just gotten out of bed. She could only look regretfully at the sandy desert from Liam's arms, and then turned her eyes closer. The barracks were near an oasis, and she found it amazing to see the palm trees and grass there, the only place in the endless sea of sand that was tinged with green.

As Jennie watched the rippling water, Liam approached the oasis and lowered Jennie into the shade of a tree. The sand in the shade was much cooler, sheltered from the scorching sun.

The feeling of her bare feet sinking into fine sand was strange. Jennie looked up at Liam, unable to move forward. He smiled, holding out his hand, and they walked together across the sand.

There were many date palms around the oasis, each filled with red fruits, so laden that the branches were weighed down, as if they were about to fall. Bending, she picked up a fallen fruit from the sand. It looked familiar as she examined it. It was a date. Curious, she looked from the palm to the fruit.

As Jennie was examining the fruit, Liam's head turned back, and she followed his eyes, surprised.

There were Kurkans hiding behind the date palms, their heads poking

out curiously as they looked at her with their peculiarly bright eyes.

"Ah..." Frightened, the sound escaped Jennie, but they seemed to interpret this as permission to approach. From barracks, wagons, camels, from behind the palms and other places, they moved forward as if fruit had fallen, and surrounded Jennie in the blink of an eye.

Startled, she dropped the date in her hand. Liam had been watching quietly, and spoke.

"You're causing a ruckus," he said, catching the date.

The Kurkans backed up a few paces at his words, but kept looking curiously at Jennie. Since Kurkans all had large physiques, they were taller than Jennie, and she felt as if she were surrounded by trees. She had to look up at all of them, and her eyes widened in surprise as she looked at them.

"Wow..." she breathed, her eyes growing large.

A male Kurkan standing to one side pointed at her and shouted, "She really is small and white! She looks like a snowflake!"

"You shouldn't talk so loud!" Another Kurkan scolded, startled. His voice was serious. "It might break..."

Haban had told them that they should be very careful, and though speaking loudly wouldn't destroy anyone, it seemed like everyone was taking it seriously.

Jennie looked down at the back of her hand. In the sunlight, her skin was so white and translucent that even the veins were visible. Compared to the tan, healthy skin of the Kurkans, her white skin made her look like a sick person. And even as she wondered whether she should tan her skin or not, the Kurkans were looking at her face, her delicate neck, and her slender arms. Their expressions sombered.

All eyes went to Liam and lingered there. He lifted a threatening eyebrow, and one of the oldest Kurkans spoke.

"Well...have you eaten yet?" He asked kindly. "Do you want me to bring you food?"



"I've already eaten."

"May I know what you've eaten?" His tone was very soft and gentle.

"Half a bowl of porridge..." Jennie answered naturally.

There was silence at the answer. The Kurkans gaped, open-mouthed and disbelieving. Had she said something wrong? But Jennie had no idea what could be wrong with half a bowl of porridge.

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## Chapter 98

### Chapter 98 — Maniacal

As Jennie thought about it, there was a hubbub among the Kurkans.

"Half a bowl of porridge! Even a one-year-old doesn't snack on that!"

"Poor Princess...she was even kidnapped..."

Complaints and reproaches about the cruel abuse rose.

"Stop," Liam said calmly. "She will break."

The murmurs ended instantly, as if they had been an illusion. The Kurkans even covered their mouths with their hands, exchanging nervous glances. They watched her as if cracks might appear in her body.

At that, Jennie couldn't contain her laughter. She laughed gently even as the Kurkans watched her curiously, a free laugh. Back in Estia, the eyes of others had been overwhelming and stressful, but now she felt comfortable.

Liam hugged her gently and lifted her into the air.

The Kurkans all lifted their heads with the motion, following her with their eyes, and he placed the date she had dropped back into her hand.

"Also, from now on she will be called Jennie, not Princess," he said.

At his words, she clutched the date tightly.

Unfamiliar places, unfamiliar people, even unfamiliar names. Many things had changed. She knew they would continue to change. But in all the turbulence, one thing was certain.

Jennie was now Jennie.

In a silent corridor, there was the sound of heavy objects being dragged. The sound of heels tapping on a marble floor, followed immediately by a shuffling sound. The sounds were caused by a woman with an expressionless face. Normally her hair was meticulously groomed, but it was in disarray now.

As she walked down an aisle, she dragged a large animal in each hand, a billy goat and a black ram, both with horns. The animals were inert and unmoving.

It was a grotesque sight, but no one stopped her. The people she encountered were not surprised and did not scream. They only bowed their heads obediently, their faces expressionless.

Slowly, she came to the Glory Room.

"....."

Cerdina looked up at the light falling from the circular window in the ceiling. This place, steeped in Estia's history, would suffice.

Taking a small dagger from her pocket, she cut her palm and used the blood to draw an octagonal star inside a large circle on the marble floor. Placing glowing crystal orbs at each of the star's eight points, she dragged the animals forward.

In the center of the star, she cut the head off the black ram. Blood gushed out, pooling. Strangely, the blood filled the magic circle as soon as it touched it, and the crystal orbs slowly filled with black smoke.

After emptying the blood from black ram, she approached the billy goat and opened its chest, extracting its heart. With the heart in her hand, Cerdina smiled.

Jennie had escaped.

Cerdina wasn't sorry the princess had run away. She was already ruined. The problem was that Jongin had blindly pursued her. Cerdina had no choice to admit that her son needed Jennie. Since it had come to this, she would have to advance one of her unfinished spells, but she could not yet do it alone.

Sitting in the light from the window overhead, she ate the goat's heart. As she chewed and swallowed the bloody flesh, the crystal orbs turned completely black. Cerdina licked bloodstained lips and tilted her head back.

"Ahh..." The strange moan escaped her, almost Orgasmic. Her eyes shone brightly as she spoke, filled with joy.

The strange voice, which could not be said to be human, echoed. The eight crystal orbs trembled slightly as if in response. The more Cerdina spoke, the more intense the trembling became.

Her bloodshot eyes were shining.

The eight crystal orbs cracked and burst into dust.

Maniacal laughter echoed through the Glory Room.

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## Chapter 99

### Chapter 99 — Birth of the Kurkans

As Jennie slept, the Kurkans began to move again.

All through the march, she slept peacefully in Liam's arms, with no worries.

The Kurkans continued even after the sun had disappeared and darkness came. The temperature fell sharply at night in the desert, and travelers usually sought various ways to warm themselves, such as lighting fires or lying on stones that had been heated by the sun all day. If they didn't, they could die of hypothermia.

But this didn't bother the Kurkans. They had a higher body temperature than humans, and eyes that could see in the dark, so they often marched at night when it was cold.

For Jennie, however, the nights in the desert would be very cold. Liam held her in his arms as he marched, sharing his body heat with her.

Liam looked up at the white stars shining in the black night sky, and then looked down at Jennie in his arms, stroking her head. Yesterday she had awakened for a while, but then she had fallen asleep again and had yet to wake up. Listening to her rhythmic breathing, he slowly looked back. The march suddenly stopped. All the Kurkans looked beyond the dunes.

Soon, dozens of people appeared in the bright moonlight. It looked like a caravan crossing the desert at first glance, but as they approached, their bronzed skins could be seen. Haban waved his big hand at the front, and Genin beside him lifted her hand.

In three weeks, they had crossed more than half the desert outside of Estian territory. Though it seemed fast, it was actually a poor speed to avoid pursuit, slowed by Jennie's poor condition. But thanks to Haban and Genin's efforts, the pursuing royals hadn't overtaken them. With their thirty Kurkan warriors, they had ambushed the pursuers

and successfully completed their mission.

But that wasn't all. They had been able to obtain information from the nobles Liam had bribed and intercept the messengers sent to Seokjin. He wouldn't discover the details of Jennie's capture until after she had arrived safely at the Kurkan royal palace.

"We have returned, Liam." Genin greeted him with a respectful bow. Haban looked at Jennie sleeping in Liam's arms.

"Is the Queen all right?" He asked mischievously.

Liam laughed at the title.

"Please, call her Jennie. She hasn't decided anything."

"Good work, Genin, Haban," said Morga, approaching and tying up his long hair. He had been carried like luggage inside a wagon, and his hair was in disarray. Haban looked at Morga's tired face and was surprised by his own sympathy for the magician.

"The Tomari on the mainland are on the move," Genin informed Liam. The words made all the Kurkans' eyes turn icy. "Though it is not certain..from the direction, it seems they are gathering in Estia."

"Will the Queen try to do something?"

"This is the first time we've seen such a large mobilization. I think we need to be careful."

"We will hold a meeting as soon as we return," he said.

"Yes, Liam." Genin turned her eyes toward Jennie, who was still sleeping soundly. "She still hasn't woken up yet?"

"She woke up for a while yesterday. She's been sleeping ever since."

"Fortunately, Liam's blood worked better than I expected," said Morga, who had been listening. His eyes were full of admiration as he looked at the King.

Haban shrugged.

"Because Liam is special," he said matter-of-factly.

The reason he was special was related to the creation of the Kurkans.

Long ago, there had been a people who did not settle in any land, but wandered from place to place. This group of nomads were known as Tomaris on the mainland, but they referred to themselves as Toma.

In their language, this meant 'person'. The Toma wanted to be respected as a people, but there was no way they could be treated as a nation when they didn't own any land.

After many years of persecution and contemptible treatment, the Toma developed a deep-rooted sense of inferiority, angry and vengeful. When these emotions were at their peak, one of the Toma declared:

*—Stand up, Toma! We are going to have our land.*

At the words of this powerful sorceress, the Toma gathered, determined to find a land of their own to settle. But as nomads they lacked the structures they needed, strong knights and arms. It would be impossible for them to take lands from other countries. And so they struck on the solution of creating a new army. A powerful army that no country could stop.

At first, they kidnapped children and brainwashed them, but since no one had ever handled an army, they did not know how to train soldiers. They made several attempts, but all ended in failure, and the Toma finally resorted to a taboo.

Creation of non-humans.

Using spells, they attempted interbreeding with beasts. The magic of the Toma and the strength of the beasts conceived a being that should never have existed. Though he had the appearance of a human, he was half human, half beast.

The beings that came unwillingly into the world were raised as beasts. They mated and reproduced with ease, and were brainwashed into obedience through spells. The Toma were able to create a perfect army that eclipsed the power of humans. But when they were close to

putting the whole continent under their feet, something went awry.

As these creatures continued to breed, a half-human, half-beast was born on whom brainwashing was impossible. A mutant creature with overwhelming strength. No spells worked on it. It even broke the spells on the other half-humans. They united under its leadership and rebelled against the Toma.

The Toma were slaughtered by the army they had created. Their plans to conquer the continent crumbled and almost overnight, they were driven to the brink of extinction. The half-human's leader personally killed the sorceress who had created them, and led his new people to arid lands beyond the reach of humans.

When they reached the desert, they became the new race, the Kurkan.

As generations passed, that powerful blood strain was diluted. But occasionally someone would be born with these atavistic abilities. Liam was most like that long-ago ancestor. His wild nature was closer to a beast's, he was stronger than anyone else, and he was immune to spells.

"Thanks to Liam, we were able to solve one problem, but we still can't rest easy."

Morga looked at Jennie, worried. He could temporarily block spells using Liam's blood, but that didn't remove them. There were some spells he had yet to decipher. On days when the spells suddenly strengthened, it could drive her to convulsions. Of course, he was doing his best to avoid that, but the problem was Jennie's body. She was so weakened, it was as if she stood on the edge of a precipice. If he tried to forcefully counter the spells, he might really damage her.

And there was another problem. Sorcery itself was a negative energy, consuming life as fuel, and so it would be difficult for her to conceive new life.

Simply put, she could not get pregnant.

Morga looked at Liam. Like animals, Kurkans had a strong instinct to



reproduce and felt great joy in having children. But when he had spoken to his King about this matter, Liam had calmly said, We must keep this a secret from Jennie.

In Estia, a woman who could not conceive was useless. That was what had happened to Jennie's mother: she had been driven out after Jennie's birth left her infertile. Growing up in a place like that, Jennie would surely be distraught when she found out she could not have children.

She was already mentally exhausted. Liam didn't want her to worry. She needed to focus solely on recovering.

"We will serve her with all our hearts."

Lost in thought, Morga looked up at Haban's words.

"Many people are waiting for Jennie," Genin added.

Tomorrow, they would finally reach Kurkan. The Kurkans who had escaped slavery were eagerly awaiting the arrival of their liberators.

"We'll make her forget Estia!" Haban shouted, clenching his fists, and then glanced at Jennie, worried that he had disturbed her. "Anyway, she is our Queen now," he said, more softly. "I mean to say...Jennie."

His words made Liam smile, and he looked down at Jennie sleeping in his arms. Her small, frail body could break any moment. How had she been able to endure for so long?

He kissed her hair. From now on, she would never suffer alone. And he would prove to her that the things she had accomplished as Princess had not been in vain.

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## Chapter 100

### Chapter 100 — Palace

Once again, she fell asleep. Even though she didn't want to, she couldn't fight off her drowsiness.

In her dream, she was running away from something, running frantically through pitch darkness. After a long time, she found a door, and beyond the open door was a light. But when she tried to reach it, she fell. Her ankles were bound, and the door slammed shut just as she looked down to see the shackles on her ankles..

The light disappeared. Darkness filled the whole place as Jennie banged desperately on the door until she was dragged by her chains into the deeper dark.

"...Ahhh!"

Jennie woke with a short cry. But as soon as she saw golden eyes staring down at her, she felt comforted.

She sighed. Liam pulled down the cloth that covered the bottom half of his face, stroking her hair with one hand.

"Did you have a nightmare?" He asked.

She gave a small nod and laid her face on his chest, realizing belatedly that she was on a horse in his arms. How many days had she slept this time? The landscape had changed completely. The desert was behind them, but before her was a green land, and beyond that, palm trees and grass and buildings like she had never seen before. Their architectural style had never been seen in Estia. And at the end of the row of white stone buildings stood the palace of the Kurkan.

It looked elegant and mysterious with its domed roof and four pointed spires, with arched doors and windows. Jennie lowered her gaze. The path the horse galloped down was paved with fine stone patterns. Even in Estia there were few roads so well constructed. This

sort of road would only be seen in the capitol, or in the castles of the wealthy.

The Kurkans' purple silk came to her mind. Even then, Jennie had realized that the Kurkans must have the best dyers on the continent.

Her assumption had been right. The mainlanders called the Kurkans barbarians, but that was not the reality. They had better craftsmanship than most developed countries. Liam chuckled at her as she looked so intently at her surroundings.

"I knew you'd like it."

Embarrassed, Jennie bit her lip and tried to calm her excitement. Everything was quiet, now that she thought about it. There was no one to be seen, just the two of them on Liam's horse. She asked where the Kurkans who had been riding with them had gone.

"I sent them to the palace first, to avoid the noise," Liam answered.

"Why...?"

"Because I didn't want them to wake you up."

The streets were also silent and empty. But soon, as Jennie watched, she realized that this was an artificial quiet. There were glowing eyes in the cracks of the windows, in the palm trees, in the dense undergrowth, the alleys, and all around her. The eyes watched curiously and instantly vanished as soon as she made eye contact. She could feel more eyes from Kurkans that she couldn't see, looking curiously at her silver hair and white skin.

It was a bit embarrassing, but she was grateful for their welcome, though she wondered if there was a reason they kept hiding.

"Is it necessary to keep them from coming out?" She asked.

"You've already experienced it once. You need quiet so you can rest properly," he said, and she closed her mouth, remembering what had happened at the oasis. "Maybe it's because of the animal blood," he continued. "But we are all very loyal to our instincts."

Jennie stared at him, puzzled.

"They're intrigued about your nature," he said. It was a very straightforward and embarrassing answer. "Of course, the choice of a mate is not determined solely by external factors..."

She understood what he meant and reddened all the way to her neck, making Liam laugh out loud.

The gates at the outer walls of the palace were open, and the palace was as silent and empty as the streets, and even more beautiful inside. Exotic plants bloomed in the garden and they stopped before an arched gate and dismounted. Liam entered the palace with Jennie in his arms.

The great height of the ceiling was surprising, creating a feeling of spaciousness, and the luxurious decorations drew the eye from one object to the next.

The most impressive feature was the tiled floor, made of gold, jewels, and marble. Square tiles connected perfectly like vines to create intricate curving patterns. Even the pillars and ceiling had symmetrical patterns that looked mesmerizing.

"I want to show you many things... but you must rest first."

As Liam walked, Jennie watched in fascination.

Before she knew it, they had reached a room

Liam's spacious room had an incredible structure, with arched doorways covered in translucent curtains separating the rooms. If the ropes tying the curtains back had been undone, all the antechambers would have been hidden.

Laying Jennie in an armchair near the bed, Liam only removed her outer robe, which was heavy with sand. She leaned back on the arabesque-patterned cushions and suddenly remembered the moment when she had first seen him in the palace in Estia.

She also remembered how out of place he had looked.

The man who had not fit very well in delicate Estia was perfectly at home in Kurkan. The palace was elegant, magnificent, and refreshing, truly a place for Liam. Whereas here, Jennie's was the strange presence. She bit her lip.

She wondered what was happening in Estia now.

Though she had arrived in the Kurkan palace after crossing the whole desert, a corner of her heart was still tied to Estia. Her feelings for her homeland hung over her like a shadow. No matter how much the light shone, it would not disappear, and at the least prompting it loomed darker, strengthening its presence.

It made her think of her nightmare. The sensation of shackles around her ankles was still vivid. Maybe that was reality. This place, this happy dream, was an illusion.

*—Have you ever strangled someone you love?*

Cerdina's smiling whispers echoed in her ears, and suddenly there was a sharp pain in her head and her breathing was ragged. A warm hand touched her forehead.

"Jennie."

Jennie squeezed her eyes shut. Slowly, her racing heart calmed down.

"Liam, I..." His hand lowered as she opened her eyes and stared at him, "...I'm still under spells. So at least stay away until I finish the treatment..."

His eyes narrowed, and Jennie fell silent at the displeasure in his face.

"It takes time to remove the spells. I'm guessing it will take at least ten years to finish the treatment," he said.

Ten years. The number made her jaw drop.

"It was hard to kidnap the bride, and now I have to leave her alone for ten years?" Before she could answer, Liam began to undress her. "You always think too much."

Surprised, Jennie tried to resist.

"Hey, wait...!"

"Don't move. I can't lay you down on the bed covered in sand."

Quickly, he stripped off the rest of her clothes and lifted her. They were in an enclosed room, but it was still broad daylight. Naked, Jennie tried to cover her breasts with her arms, but it still left her lower body uncovered. The sensation of the wind blowing over her private parts made her tighten her thighs.

"And if someone is watching me!"

"Then that individual wants to die soon."

As he carried her through multiple arched doorways, they came to a windowless bathroom, lit only with lamps. A bathtub filled with steaming water was in the center, and white flower petals floated on the surface. Jennie sat in the water as Liam stripped off his clothes in front of her, revealing his well-developed muscles, a thick ribcage and well-defined abs. Jennie gazed at his powerful muscles and then blushed as her eyes met his.

"Don't do that, Jennie. You need to bathe and get some more sleep." Liam stepped out of his pants, revealing his manhood, which was already half erect.

"You won't be able to sleep if you keep looking at me like that," he warned.

Quickly, Jennie lowered her gaze. The surface of the water rippled violently as Liam stepped into the bathtub. Liam licked his lips as he looked at her white face and flushed cheeks. But fortunately he only stroked her cheek and then concentrated on washing.

Dried and dressed, they lay side by side on the bed, and exhaustion began to overtake her. It really did seem that her body had become so weak. Liam had closed the curtains so she could sleep and lent her his chest as a pillow.

It had been a long time since he had been home, so he should have

had a lot of things to do, but he showed no sign of concern. Jennie knew she should let him go, but she wanted to lean on him for a little longer. In his arms, she murmured sleepily.

"...I don't know what to do now."

"There's no need to rush," Liam whispered as he stroked her damp hair. "You should take some time to rest and recover, then you can decide calmly. If you want to do something, I can assign you some responsibilities. It would be a shame to waste your abilities."

Jennie lifted her head. She wanted to help him.

Liam smiled at her interest.

"Coincidentally, there is a suitable position available," he said cheekily. "Queen of Kurkan."

"....."

Jennie stared at him without any idea what to say, and he raised a challenging eyebrow.

"What will you do if I refuse...?" She muttered.

Liam smiled, bringing his face close to hers.

"Are you going to refuse, Jennie?" His eyes curved.

"Me?"

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## Chapter 101

### Chapter 101 — Tie Me Up

Despite her caution, Jennie was attracted by those smiling eyes. She knew Liam was an exceptional and beautiful man, even if he made her cringe sometimes with his shamelessness.

But when he looked at her, his fierce eyes softened.

There was no way she could refuse this man. Jennie shook her head and leaned against his chest, and Liam hugged her as if he had been waiting for just that. The hand caressing her spine was warm and firm.

"I thought I had left everything behind..."

She could hear the rattling of chains in her ears, and though she knew it was an auditory hallucination, she had to fight the urge to look down at her ankles. She didn't want to look. Part of her feared that her ankles were actually shackled. She tucked her feet under the blanket.

"I'm still thinking about Estia," she confessed, trying to escape the shadows tormenting her. "It's...upsetting..."

Liam laid his hand on her head, her cheek resting against his firm chest.

"Don't think about anything. Just go to sleep. You'll be fine after a good sleep."

Jennie closed her eyes. She hadn't even been awake half a day, but she drifted back to sleep in his arms, hoping she could stay awake for a little longer tomorrow.

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*Her body was moving on its own. Jennie didn't like this. She wanted to scream, but nothing came out of her mouth. Grabbing a dagger, she approached the man, sleeping soundly.*



*Though he had been sleeping, his eyes slowly opened as she approached, and the moment she met the gaze of those golden eyes, she plunged the dagger into his heart. The horrible sensation of cutting into human flesh was transmitted directly into her hands.*

*Only then was she released from her restraints. But now that she could speak, Jennie said nothing. She could only look down at what she had done, and it was Liam who made the first move as she remained frozen and soulless.*

*"It's okay," he said, hugging her. "It's okay, Jennie."*

*"Why, why.." Jennie said, as his hot blood began to spill. Though he could have stopped her from stabbing him, he had just watched as she plunged the dagger into him. Liam tucked a lock of her hair behind her ear, whispering.*

*"I didn't want you to get hurt by accident if I dodged it."*

Jennie woke up, startled. The line between dream and reality was blurred and she panicked, rolling over and tumbling off the bed. She stifled a yelp of pain and rushed to check her hands. She sagged when she saw they were clean of blood, overcome with relief and anxiety.

It was a dream. But it could also become reality any moment. A thought appeared in her mind.

I have to go back to Estia.

She did not belong here. She had to go back to Estia.

She staggered to her feet and ran to the nearest exit, a window covered with a thin curtain. The cool night breeze touched her face as soon as she pulled the curtain aside, and Jennie came to her senses as though she had been slapped.

"....."

Jennie stared blankly. Dim moonlight shone on the white stone buildings, and palm fronds swayed in the breeze. She let out the breath she had been holding and sank down to the ground, covering

her face in her hands.

Her whole body trembled. Only now did she really understand. Not only had she become Cerdina's puppet, but she had lost her mind. She was unhinged. She thought she had found the bottom, but there was no end to this despair. There was always a worse hell.

Alone in the dark, Jennie turned, startled. A pair of eyes was watching her in the moonlight streaming through the window. He stood silently and looked at her with calm eyes, as if he had been watching from the beginning. Looking up at him, her lips moved slowly.

"...Lock me up."

Her fear was unbearable. Especially with the vision of this man, unresisting as she stabbed him, floating before her eyes.

"You can put me in jail, isolate me somewhere, or tie me up. If this goes on, I can really kill you..." She whispered, her face pale. "Help me with this, Liam."

Liam didn't respond to her desperate plea. He knew better than anyone else that she had not been freed from the Queen's spells. He likely understood exactly what was in her mind. But he showed no fear, smiling slightly as he looked down at her.

"You are so naive..." he said. Lifting her, he slung her over his shoulder and carried her to the bed, throwing her onto it. A moment later, something fell on the bed in front of her.

It was a pair of leather cuffs with a chain. Unlike the cuff in the carriage that only bound one wrist, these bound both, and Liam attached them deftly, securing the chain on the canopy at the head of the bed.

That wasn't all. He shackled her ankles as well.

There was no long chain from the canopy, but a short one between her ankles. The chain was only the width of a hand, so it was impossible for her to even walk. Having her limbs bound made her feel better. Despite the discomfort, it was a relief that she wouldn't be

able to hurt Liam as she had in her dreams.

"I have tied you up as you wished." Liam said as he climbed on top of Jennie. "I promised you I would heal you, so I don't understand why you are so worried."

She knew that. She was also confident that she would recover.

"But you said it would take ten years..." she whispered. She would have to live ten years with the anguish of knowing she might kill him.

Liam slowly crouched, his large body covering her completely, illustrating the difference in the size of their bodies. Instinctively, she tried to shrink back, but the cuffs on her wrists kept her from moving away.

"In those ten years?" Liam asked, smirking. "Are you worried I'll die by your hands?"

She blinked. Now she understood what he meant when he called her naive. Jennie examined the man before her. She was pale and thin, but he was tanned and robustly muscled. The fear embedded in her heart like needles vanished. Jennie looked up at him with trembling eyes.

"I..."

Then she asked something else of him.

"Give me a kiss."

Liam's eyes curved.

"I was going to anyway."

Slowly, their lips touched. He bit her lips softly and slipped his tongue in. A warmth she had forgotten surged in her lower belly. She let out a small moan, her arms lifting to try to hug him, but instead her chains rattled.

It was the same sound that haunted her dreams and even her reality

in auditory hallucinations, but now it did not frighten her. She was with Liam.

They kissed, sharing their warmth. Staring at each other without looking away, rubbing and sucking each other's tongues. As their kiss intensified, her body warmed completely.

Their lips parted with a wet noise, their hot breaths panting together. Liam looked down at her with his eyes half-closed.

"I want to..." Jennie whispered hesitantly, and the corners of his mouth turned up.

"What?" He asked with a smile.

"I want to do it with you."

She wanted to be completely in his domain. She wanted to feel protected by his side, as Jennie, not as Cerdina's puppet. She couldn't embrace him with her hands, so instead she tried to gently kiss his cheek. But since her lips couldn't reach, she bit the side of his chin.

Not even a bite marked his hard skin. She delicately licked his chin.

"Put it inside me..." She said hesitantly. She felt very embarrassed, saying it. She wished she could speak more fluently, more seductively, but she had no talent for it. Jennie bit her lip.

Even as she was embarrassed at her own boldness, Liam was motionless, staring intently at her, his golden eyes shining so sharply that she felt a wave of déjà vu.

"...I always think about it." He whispered. "If the animal blood inside me was any denser, you'd be in trouble."

Slowly, his hands roamed her body. Moving over her cleavage, he lightly brushed her nipples, visible under her thin nightgown. His hands slid down her thighs to her calves and grasped her ankles, lifting her shackled ankles up. Liam slid a pillow under her waist and licked his lips.

"If I followed my impulses, you'd be sore by now," he murmured.

The bottom of her Kurkan-style nightgown slipped down, a thin one-piece with a drawstring at her waist that left her otherwise completely uncovered.

Belatedly, she remembered that she had no underclothes.

Looking between her legs, Liam bit her ankles around the shackles, leaving marks on her white skin.

"Let's do this before we put it inside," he said, and thrust his manhood between her thighs.

His manhood was stiff. The way it protruded between her thin thighs was intimidating, the tip of his cock sliding easily through the thighs staining her white skin.

Thanks to Liam, she had had sex in the strangest ways. But this...

Jennie gaped at him. Somehow it seemed incredible that he would come up with this.

"If I do this first, it won't be so hard for you," he said, and though he was telling the truth, she still felt as if she had been tricked. Her eyes widened as she felt something warm between her legs. Since she had almost no hair there, she could feel every inch of his genitals.

It was making her tingle, and she quickly became embarrassingly wet. Her jerky motions smoothed as his hot, thick manhood rubbed over her between her legs. As he stroked hard over her, she could even feel the veins protruding from his manhood.

Her thighs trembled. There was a wet sound, and she gasped as her thighs contracted. Impulsively, she wanted to clutch the sheet, but her hands were still bound.

Again, Liam thrust his manhood between her thighs.

Every time he thrust between her reddened thighs, her body swayed and her breasts bounced, and she tried to cover her breasts with her arms.

Liam immediately pulled on the chain, lifting her arms up with a

metallic jangling.

"You have to make me come fast, Jennie."

Holding her calves in one hand, he grabbed her breast with the other, his eyes fastening on the nipple protruding between his fingers. His hungry gaze clearly indicated he wanted to suck on it.

He was making her feel embarrassed, even though she had already been undressed countless times in front of him. Every time he looked at her like that, she felt like the most lustful, sensual woman in the world.

Excitement mingled with her embarrassment and her honest body shuddered. Liam watched her reactions intently and stroked his cock over her clitoris, smiling wickedly as he rubbed the swollen nub.

"You're pretty horny yourself."

It was nothing like his rigid manhood, but he made her sound as lustful as he was, and she couldn't think of any arguments. Her face flushed.

"I guess it's because I like it..."

It was only a few words, but their impact was powerful. His manhood hardened and jerked as if he were about to climax. He gritted his teeth.

"Next time I'll have to put a gag in your mouth."

"Otherwise..."

He lifted her hips without finishing the sentence, bending her body almost in half as his manhood rubbed hard against her, filling her with pleasure as he stroked intensely over and over her. It was Jennie that climaxed first.

"Ahhh...!"

She let out a scream, and Liam roughly withdrew his manhood as she shuddered, pulling her body downward. The veins in his manhood

were taut and pulsing as if they were about to burst, and he pushed it against her lips.

"Mmm, open your mouth..."

As soon as her lips parted, something hard slid inside, swelling as hot liquid gushed out, filling her mouth with his semen.

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## Chapter 102

### Chapter 102 — Embarrassment

Holding her breath, she looked up at him with eyes round and startled as a rabbit's. Liam caressed her lips gently.

"Can you swallow it?" He whispered.

Slowly, she swallowed his semen, looking up into his eyes. She felt a warmth in her throat, and when she had swallowed it all, Liam kissed her forehead.

"Why, why, why, suddenly...?" Jennie asked him haltingly.

"From now on you have to eat everything."

"Huh, semen?"

"That way you can improve your condition faster."

In spite of her embarrassment, she had asked him why she had to swallow his semen, but that was no explanation. She couldn't understand him at all. Her chains rattled as Liam turned her over, and he licked his lips as he looked down at her.

Below her slender waist, her round buttocks were reddened as if someone had spanked them, as were the inside of her thighs. Parting her buttocks with both hands, Liam revealed the deep pink flesh between her legs, inserting his middle finger into the wet, slippery cleft. Reflexively, Jennie tried to flee.

He chuckled as he watched her crawl away and dragged her back by the short chain between her ankles, returning her to her place under him.

Reaching for the chain on the canopy bed, he shortened it until her arms strained.

"Why are you trying to run away?" He asked. "Don't be so shy..."



Kissing her spine, he bent her over. With her hands tied, she could only move her hips as she lay face down on the bed. Liam thrust his face between her legs and Jennie let out a gasp.

"Ah...!"

His tongue licked around the outside and then delved into her as he rubbed her thighs and buttocks. The sounds of his lips and tongue sucking the fluids from her clit made her eyes tear.

Jennie shuddered so hard she couldn't even moan. A series of climaxes rocked her body and her inner walls contracted, clenching on his tongue. It only made the sensation inside her more intense.

She couldn't close her mouth as she panted, her eyes filling with tears. The pleasure ravaged her body and saliva spilled from her lips. Was this because she had not had sex for so long? She didn't know what to do.

She was barely coming down when long fingers touched her clitoris, and she shook her head frantically as Jennie began to gently rub her, thrusting his tongue inside her.

"Ah, don't, that, mm, no...!"

The sensations intensified. She was about to come, in a moment she was going to come, and she moaned, shuddering uncontrollably.

Suddenly, Liam, both mouth and fingers. A moan escaped her. He had stopped just before she climaxed.

"Ahh..."

But in a moment he was back to stroking her clitoris with his fingertips, gently this time. She wanted him to rub it harder, but he didn't, and just as she was about to climax again, he withdrew his hand. The way he kept stopping right before she came was driving her crazy, her body was so hot, and her mouth was almost dry.

"Ah, Li, Liam..." She couldn't stand the tingling in her lower belly. Her mind was filled with the thought of something thick and hot penetrating her. Jennie shook her hips impatiently, pleading. "Put it

in, ah, please, quick...!"

She could not believe she was doing something so lascivious, but she had no time to think about it. His solid manhood penetrated deep inside her tight channel.

"Ahhhhhhh...!"

She was approaching the longed-for climax and fluids began to gush from inside her, slicking the inside of her thighs. Her nipples rubbed against the sheet as she shook her hips wildly.

Every time her insides were rubbed with his hard manhood, she thought she would die of satisfaction.

She shuddered, clutching the pillow tightly, her chains rattling. A wave of pleasure swept over her so powerfully that her vision dimmed, and a passion-filled moan escaped her.

"Ahhh...!"

She climaxed again. Liam turned her around, their genitals stilled joined, and she felt his whole body rubbing against her, making her moan again.

Suddenly, there was a snapping sound, and the chain between her legs broke. Jennie's legs parted wide.

Already exhausted, Jennie looked up at him, limp.

Liam's eyes were slightly reddened, and he smiled.

"From now on I'm going to penetrate you properly."

Jennie looked at him, dumbfounded. From now on?

What had they been doing already?

Of course, now that she thought about it, Liam had only come once. She, on the other hand, had climaxed several times. Liam drew her out of her thoughts by tearing off her nightgown and tossing it into the corner of the wide bed.

He moved slowly as he thrust into her, their eyes locked together. His manhood slowly pushed into her inner walls, making her shiver, holding her breath until he was fully sheathed inside her.

Sighing, she met his eyes as they trembled together.

"....."

Silently, Liam squeezed her thighs in his hands, so strongly that he left the marks of his fingers.

Belatedly he realized what he was doing and released her, sinking his manhood into her harder.

He couldn't even be compared to a beast. He lashed out, rough and far beyond anything she could endure, and with her hands tied, she had no control over body. She shuddered as he rammed into her, the sound of his body colliding with hers smacking loud and rough. Her heated body accepted this gladly. Soon, she climaxed again, her eyes closing tightly in agonized pleasure.

"Mm, ahh...!"

Her whole body trembled as her muscles cramped.

But Liam didn't stop. He kept going, never giving her a moment to rest, forcing her through a series of climaxes in rapid succession. She climaxed every time his manhood moved in and out of her, her face and tongue numbed with pleasure. She wanted to tell him to stop, but she found it difficult to even say his name. Finally she found the strength to speak.

"Ah, Li, Liam..." she said confusedly, and he caught her tongue in his fingers, rubbing it to make her saliva flow to her lips.

"You have to speak properly."

"Ah, mm, ahh...!"

"What can I do for you?"

She bit his finger. But of course, there was no mark in his tough skin,

and as he thrust again, she shivered, moaning. It felt as if her body had reached its limit, but she still couldn't say what she wanted.

As she the onslaught of relentless pleasure went on, she dimly heard his whisper.

"Are you still afraid, Jennie?"

Jennie blinked tears from her eyes. At some point she had stopped noticing the sound of her chains, even though they were rattling loudly. The moment she realized it, all of her senses felt more vivid, the feel of his hot manhood stretching her inner walls, the warmth of his skin, the sweet air of his exhalations, and his golden eyes staring at her.

She couldn't speak. He didn't wait for her answer as he moved again, and she thought she could feel the exact shape of his manhood inside her, her lower body heated as if she were on fire, tingling deep inside her.

It was a feeling she had felt before, hot and liquid and bursting, and though she was embarrassed, she couldn't move. Her lower belly cramped and she tried to move her hands, but she couldn't even hide her face because of the taut chain binding her cuffs to the canopy.

She tried to buck him away, but she had no strength, but it was enough to make him stop.

"Ah, I can't..." Jennie began desperately.

Liam just stared at her, as if he wouldn't hear her unless she said the words clearly. Her face flushed as she said the embarrassing words.

"I think I'm going to come..." No response. Jennie's voice rose, pleading. "Please...! Huh...!"

But he only pushed her legs further apart, and though she tried to keep them together, there was no way to overcome his grip. Her clitoris was fully exposed.

She couldn't even speak. All she could do was yank futilely at her bound wrists, the chain rattling. All she wanted to do was hide her

face if she couldn't push him away, but bound as she was, she couldn't even do that.

Jennie's toes curled as she tried to restrain herself, but as Liam's manhood continued to penetrate deep inside her, she couldn't do it. Every thrust brushed over her swollen clitoris.

She couldn't bear it any longer. All the strength in her lower body was gone and she turned her head to the side, crying. A strong hand grabbed her chin as Liam forced her to look him in the face.

"Ah, ah... ahh!"

Her body shook, her breasts swaying with the intensity of his thrusts into her body, and a gush of fluid burst from her onto his tanned belly, trickling downward. The weakness spread through her whole body and Jennie couldn't even moan.

Her dark pink nipples trembled as her breasts swayed. There was no time to rest, the tremors wracking her went on and on. Liam never paused in his thrusting, his hips driving into her, penetrating her ferociously. His eyes were intent, watching her face as he invaded her, pleasuring her. Under that golden gaze, she moaned, her eyes blurred.

"Ah, mm, ah, ah, ah...!"

Everytime he thrust his manhood into her, his vision flickered. Liam ignored her flickering eyes and kept thrusting, driving more faint pulses of fluid from her even after she had come, soaking their lower bodies.

When nothing else came out of her, he bent to kiss her, but Jennie turned her head away, sobbing weakly.

That liquid had come out of her again. She didn't know what it was, it wasn't urine, but she couldn't get used to it and couldn't stand the embarrassment.

But he was smiling.

"How sexy," he said, even as she was looking up at him with

resentment and incomprehension. "How pretty. I don't understand why I want to torment you repeatedly. I'm afraid you'll make me develop a strange hobby..."

He turned her body to kiss the back of her neck, his hands cupping and squeezing her breasts tightly.

Gently, he rubbed her nipples as he inserted his manhood from behind. Jennie's face was buried in a pillow, but she lifted it and raised her hips, a short moan escaping her. She hadn't thought she could even lift a finger, but her body moved reflexively.

Liam sucked at her neck, leaving red marks.

Pressing his body against hers, he moved his hips as he rubbed her breasts. His voice whispered seductively in her ear.

"Tell me it feels good, Jennie..."

She didn't have the strength to hide anything anymore. She had long since lost the capacity to filter her words, the pleasure was too intense. For once, she told him the truth of what he was making her feel.

"Oh, great, ah, ahhh..."

As if he was rewarding her, he shoved his manhood deep inside her. She shuddered.

"Mm, too good, Liam..."

"... My name, say it more."

"Ahh, Liam, Liam, Liam... ah, I like it... so much..."

She raised her hips to meet him, saying his name over and over. Every time she said his name, she felt a wave of pleasure, and another burst of that fluid between her legs, but she no longer cared.

"Mm, Jennie..."

His nose grazed her neck and his sharp teeth bit her, and even that

pain became pleasure. She moaned as he whispered to her, lost in her primitive pleasure.

"I'll make sure nothing makes you suffer, Jennie..."

Liam let out a low, fierce moan as his large hands gripped her hips, pushing her body down as the muscles in his thighs tensed. His sharp teeth bit the nape of her neck and his golden eyes glowed as he poured his hot seed into her. As if he was marking his territory, he stained her inside and out with white liquid.

"Ahg, argg...!" The moan that burst from her was so loud, it surprised even her as her whole body trembled through a euphoric climax. Liam hugged her as her vision darkened, and she lost consciousness.

One last thought flashed through her mind before she fell into total darkness.

I'm not afraid of anything anymore.

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## Chapter 103

### Chapter 103 — Frequent

Liam slowly pushed her sweat-soaked hair back. She was asleep. She had fainted again after sex. Gazing at her white, tearstained face, he removed the leather cuffs from her wrists, the chains rattling.

He had brought the leather cuffs in case she panicked, since he couldn't always be with her; he intended to tie her up so she wouldn't hurt herself.

But he had never planned to use them this way.

With the cuffs off, he kissed the red marks on her wrists and ankles. He licked the protruding bones in her ankles, lightly bit her knees, even rubbed his face on the inside of her thighs. The secret area between her legs was in full view, devoid of pubic hair, pink and moist as cream. His semen had begun to spill out of her, and Liam pushed it back in with his fingers.

The wet sensation on his fingers made his manhood jerk, and he sighed.

"Haa..."

Inwardly, he smiled. Just looking at her made his manhood rise. If someone accused him of being a beast, he couldn't argue.

Slowly, he began stroking his veined manhood, the movement becoming faster, making a rhythmic noise. Liam licked his dry lips. Squinting, he looked at the white body before him. Her white body was covered in red marks. It satisfied him, like a beast that had marked its territory.

Reaching out a hand, he caressed her breast, the soft nipple protruding between his fingers. He couldn't help lowering his head to bite it and lick it until it swelled again, dark pink.

Even though he was being a little rough, Jennie didn't move a muscle. She was probably exhausted; she only frowned and let out a



soft moan. Her silver eyelashes trembled.

"Mmm..."

That sound instantly stimulated him. Liam's expression was fierce, bestial, as he felt his climax coming. Squeezing her breast, he let out a low groan.

"Mm, ahh..."

His muscles tensed as his semen sprayed onto her belly. His chest swelled and contracted with every breath as his semen spurted, and his manhood only softened after he came a few more times.

Liam bent his face to her breasts and kissed them all over. Smelling her scent, he felt his manhood rise again, but this time he really would restrain himself.

It wasn't easy. He had to bite her slender neck again before he could make himself get up.

Bringing a cloth to wipe her belly, Liam suddenly stopped and looked at her as she slept soundly. He had fed her equally today, in both her upper and lower mouths, so he thought he didn't need to feed her anymore. Besides, it wasn't a good idea to disturb her when she was sleeping...

If anyone could have read his thoughts, they would have accused him of having no conscience. Liam cleaned her body and then sat with her, leaning against the headboard of the bed. Beside him, he pulled Jennie to him so she could lay her head on his thigh and covered her with a soft blanket.

Fumbling through his nightstand, he produced his tobacco pipe. In Estia he had made do with cigars and a rough pipe, but now that he was back in Kurkan, he had a proper pipe, long and thin and elegant.

He drew a puff into his mouth. The characteristic refreshing aroma wafted through the room, and his excitement slowly subsided. His glowing golden eyes lost their intensity.

His eyes drooped as he looked down at Jennie and stroked her hair.

Her eyelids trembled at his touch.

She must have been very tired. But there was a pink glow to her cheeks, and the strain in her face had faded considerably. As his hand passed through her hair, Liam remembered what Morga had told him.

*—It is recommended that you have sex frequently...*

As soon as they had reached the city, Morga had summoned all the sorcerers in Kurkan. He planned to work with them to decipher the spells on Jennie and discover methods to remove them. Until then, however, the temporary treatment was frequent sex.

Liam's blood had been far more effective than expected. Morga hoped that his semen might also have some effect, given Liam's immunity to spells.

Whenever Liam had had sex with Jennie in the past, in fact, she had been noticeably more stable afterward.

*—But it is only a hypothesis. Please don't overdo it.*

Morga had obviously added those words for Jennie's sake. Liam had tried to restrain himself, but she had ended up fainting again anyway.

Exhaling a slow stream of smoke, Liam caressed her thin shoulder. She had lost more weight from the severity of the Queen's treatments in preparation for her marriage to Seokjin.

She needed to gain it back.

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## Chapter 104

### Chapter 104 — Conquest

Although Jennie was no longer in Estia, her heart was still trapped in the palace of that country. The Queen had been hurting her for a very long time. She would not recover easily. Liam frowned as he looked at her, remembering the way she had begged him for help.

*—Help me with this, Liam.*

He could not understand her anxiety. After he saw her suffering through nightmares and hallucinations, he had bound her as she requested to let her know she was in a safe place. He wanted her to understand that she was in his domain now, not the Queen's. But it seemed to him it wasn't enough.

It was a problem that couldn't be resolved until the root cause was eradicated. Liam chuckled, gently stroking Jennie's forehead with his fingers.

He imagined a crown in her silver hair as he brought his pipe back to his mouth.

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The Kurkans who had just returned to the palace were very busy. Since they had been away for a long time, there was a great deal of unfinished business, but they were constantly being disturbed.

The cause was the King's bride, who had been kidnapped from Estia. Unable to satisfy their curiosity with Liam himself, the Kurkans harassed those who had been to Estia with him. Genin and Haban barely managed to escape.

"I'm really going to die," Haban muttered as he pushed open the conference room door. It was a huge door that stretched from the floor to the ceiling, and could have only been opened by several adults in most places. For a Kurkan, however, it posed no problem.

Genin and Haban bowed politely and offered greetings as they

entered the conference room, where a dozen Kurkans were seated at a long ebony table decorated with gold. The room was covered in colorful arabesque tiles, a place where the tribal chiefs gathered. Haban and Genin were here as the King's guards.

Morga, as chief of the snake tribe, was also seated at the table and looking exhausted. He had come to the meeting directly after rising from sleep. He had been sleeping ever since they returned to the palace.

"Where is the King?" One chief asked.

"Liam is breeding..." Genin answered immediately.

Beside her, Haban nudged her.

"Now that Jennie is here, let's not use that word," he whispered.

"Ah," Genin said, and corrected, "Mating..."

Haban nudged her again. Genin hesitated.

"Ssx...?" She offered uncertainly, and at Haban's nod, she continued more firmly, "He's trying hard at sex."

Watching the two idiots, Morga smiled.

"I'm... worried," Genin added, frowning.

"Yes. I think it will be too much for Jennie," Haban agreed, with a serious expression. Although Kurkans might have sex for several days, Jennie was a completely different creature. Picturing the thin, weak woman, Morga's eyes trembled.

"I think I have a little guilt..." he muttered.

The door opened and everyone rose from their seats in respect. The man who entered sat naturally at the head of the table, and Genin and Haban took their places behind him. Only after he was seated did the other chiefs sit down. Liam looked at each of the Kurkans gathered in the conference room.

"We have gathered again after so long," he said, holding out a hand. Haban had already prepared his pipe for him, and Liam accepted it, moving immediately to the chief matter. "In a month's time, we will begin the conquest of Estia."

He smiled at the surprised look on his people's faces.

"Wouldn't it be great to give it to my bride as a wedding present."

The conquest of Estia had been planned for some time. As a matter of fact, the reason they had visited Estia under the guise of peace negotiations had been partly in preparation for the invasion. But a date had not been suggested until now. Tension filled the conference room.

"But the spells..." Morga pointed out hastily.

"We'll keep the Queen alive," said Liam.

".....!"

That was totally unexpected. Morga stared at the King.

"Find all the spells cast on Jennie before then," Liam added. "And I'd like you to..."

Morga's eyes widened as Liam explained his idea.

"Is that possible?"

Normally, no. But Morga thought it might be possible with Liam. It was worth a try. The sorcerer clenched his hands tightly. Liam's path had never been easy. From the day Morga had begun serving him until now, the King had always traveled the impossible road. He had accomplished things others said he could never do, until he had finally taken the throne of Kurkan.

To Morga, Liam was a lighthouse. No matter how uncertain the road, he would always trust and follow him. He had no doubt that this time would be the same. Morga nodded firmly.

"I will do it," he said.

"The warriors are ready," said the chief of the bear tribe enthusiastically. "They may leave for war within a month."

Liam's eyes narrowed as he tapped the ashes out of his pipe.

"I don't want massive, total war," he said.

One of the tribal chiefs was about to ask why, but shut his mouth, belatedly remembering that the King's bride was the Princess of Estia. She had sacrificed a great deal to protect that country, and it was falling apart. For her sake, Liam would try to minimize the damage when he conquered it.

"What if we capture the palace first, and then the country?" The chief of the fox tribe asked, and explained his general scheme. They would secretly gather troops near the capital, and then seize the royal palace in a single day.

The security in the capital had already been compromised by an influx of Tomari from all over the continent. The previously vigilant watch had been relaxed. Infiltration would be easy. Though Seokjin's intervention could be troublesome, they could divert his army's attention elsewhere while they captured the capital.

"However, an all-out war against Seokjin will be inevitable, " Liam said with a broad smile. "She will tolerate it if it is only against Seokjin."

Once everyone understood the general plan, they began to discuss the details. Each of the tribal chiefs was free to offer their opinion, and while they sometimes argued with each other, Liam always had the final word.

There were a variety of other subjects to be discussed aside from Estia, due to Liam's long absence. After several hours, Liam decided to give everyone a short break. Putting down his pipe, he looked at the chief of the bear clan.

"I have heard that the dates from your territory are especially sweet and delicious," he said.

"...Yes?"

"Bring some."

"....."

The tribal chief was frozen in place, with no idea what to say. Liam had never made such a request that before.

"I ca, I can, bring you anything you want..." The chief said belatedly, so shocked that he stammered.

"Select the most precious ones," Liam said calmly, and added, "I'm not going to eat them."

'He will give them to his bride...' The tribal chief, who quickly realized what he meant, quickly replied with determination.

"I will choose the most precious ones!"

Liam's eyes curved.

"If you have anything delicious besides that, bring it. My bride has little appetite, so I'll try to feed her more."

There was a smile in his eyes at the thought of his bride. It was the first time any of the chiefs had seen him like this. Though he was superficially lenient to his subordinates, it was only to camouflage his savage nature, sharp as a sword. But now he looked as sweet as candy, the sword sheathed. The tribal chiefs exchanged glances, sharing the same thought.

They would bring everything delicious they had, if they had to invent it.

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## Chapter 105

### Chapter 105 — Unexpected Death

The Princess of Estia had been kidnapped by the barbarian King.

The misfortunes of such an important person were the kind of gossip society enjoyed most. Everyone was talking about the Princess, and the barbarians, and Seokjin, who had lost his bride.

They talked about how humiliating the beautiful Princess's treatment must have been among the vulgar barbarians, every rumor more shameful than the last. The chaos in the royal palace worsened every day.

"If things continue like this, the country really will be ruined," Count Valtein sighed. Finance Minister Laurent, sitting opposite, echoed his sigh, and Countess Melissa sipped her tea in silence.

The three people closest to the Princess had gathered at her former palace for tea after losing their master. Though it had been a long time since they met, the atmosphere was sober. Everything was in turmoil.

The day of the kidnapping, Crown Prince Jongin had immediately begun pursuit with the royal knights.

But the disorganized and frenzied pursuit had only resulted in losing a considerable number of knights when they were attacked by night.

Seokjin was enraged, having lost his future wife, and lashed out at the royal family. They had had to return the dowry he had paid for the Princess, and were just relieved that he had not asked for compensation money. He swore never to leave the barbarians in peace.

Surprisingly, however, he had agreed that if the Princess was retrieved from the barbarians, he would still marry her. It was shocking, considering she had surely lost her virginity by now. People praised him for his generosity, but those who knew the Princess knew



he was only doing it for himself.

Countess Melissa set down her teacup.

"Honestly, I would like the Princess to stay with the Kurkans," she said firmly.

"Madam...!" Count Valtein stared at her in surprise.

"Despite the rudeness of the Kurkans, they have been good to the Princess," she said firmly. "Besides, if the Princess were to return to Estia..."

Her voice faded to a sad murmur.

"It will only carry a greater burden than she had before."

"....."

None of them could argue with her words. For a time, the three sat in bleak silence.

The political mechanisms of the royal family were barely functioning, and it seemed they could come to a halt any time. Seokjin was causing trouble among the nobles, increasing the pressure on the royal family every day.

It seemed that the royal house would inevitably collapse. Without the efforts of the Princess, it was only the matter of time. Finance Minister Laurent shook his head.

"But I don't know what the Queen is thinking," he said suddenly.

All of them knew her cunning and her obsessive love for her son. The only thing on her mind was the day the Crown Prince would ascend the throne. But it was strange that she stood by while the country was collapsing. And the Prince, renowned for his bad temper, had done nothing after the failed pursuit of the Princess.

They all had done nothing, as if they had other plans.

"Actually, I think the Queen has been behaving oddly. Did you know

that all the flowers in the garden of the Queen's Palace have wilted..."

Countess Melissa frowned at his words and lowered her eyes thoughtfully.

"Come to think of it, lately there are many new servants in the royal palace," she said. "I heard the Queen chose them, but no one knows where they came from. They have no courtesy."

The new people had upended the hierarchy in the royal palace. It was all the servants and ladies-in-waiting were talking about. Listening, Count Valtein tapped his finger on the table anxiously.

"This is still an unsubstantiated rumor," he began abruptly. He looked at them both. "It is said that the Queen is letting Tomari into the palace..."

Both of their eyes widened as they thought what this meant, but there was a sudden noise outside and the door burst open. A red-faced lady-in-waiting was shouting breathlessly.

"His Majesty..."

All three rose from their chairs at the same time, sharing the same dread, the same terrible suspicion.

The lady's voice trembled.

"His Majesty...is dead."

The King had died unexpectedly and suddenly.

\*\*\*

### ***WARNING: FLESH EATING***

Cerdina's mother was beautiful. She knew it, and knew how to use it. It was how she obtained the title of Countess Weddleton. Blinded with love, the Count had covered up her low status.

When she was young, Cerdina would go with her mother sometimes to the center of the city, where they would turn off onto a road and

find a particular alley. There was a group of men and women who sang there sometimes, playing on the strings of small guitars. When they saw Cerdina and her mother, they would approach excitedly, talking to Cerdina's mother in a language she didn't understand, and giving the girl jewelry and crude toys.

When her arms were already filled with toys, a woman with a charming smile placed a crystal orb on top of the pile.

—*You may need this.*

On the way home, Cerdina looked at the orb curiously.

—*Mother, are you Estians? She had asked.*

Her mother's beautiful brow furrowed. She answered in a soft but firm voice.

—*We are not Estians. Neither are we Tomari. We are Toma.*

Later, Cerdina ate her mother's heart to become more powerful than anyone else. But even this was not sufficient to conquer the world. The King of Estia was caught in her ambitions, and as soon as she saw the opportunity, Cerdina cast a spell that would turn the whole continent upside down.

It was something that no one else would have dared to do. She cast a spell that would make the humblest blood into the greatest.

"Ahh, ahhh..."

She screamed and shuddered as she climaxed. Her face was flushed as she twisted a silk cord in one hand and caressed the King's cheek with the other.

"Rest, husband," she said affectionately. The cord tightened on his neck and his face turned blue. He couldn't breathe. His body trembled, stiffening.

"Oh..."

Cerdina burst out laughing when she felt the flood of his semen

inside her.

The King's eyelids closed to cover unfocused eyes.

His twitching body went limp. Cerdina bent her ear to his chest. Only when she was sure he had completely stopped breathing did she release the cord.

"Ahh..."

She stood, slowly pulling his manhood out of her, and slipped into the robe she had placed nearby, the soft silk covering her white skin. She tied the sash around her waist.

"Jongin," she called. At her affectionate summons, the man seated behind curtains approached slowly.

His blond hair suited him well. Cerdina stroked his silvery hair and plucked an object off the nightstand.

The dagger stained with dried blood was a relic of her mother.

"It's the same thing I did with my mother," she said comfortingly.

"....."

Jongin did not respond. Gazing at his expressionless face, Cerdina's eyes narrowed.

"This is for..."

"Shut up."

He took the dagger from her. It was rude, but she was too overcome with joy to mind. Jongin approached the King's body and drove the dagger into his chest. Blood poured out to stain the bed.

Soon, the wet sounds of raw flesh being chewed filled the room.

Cerdina watched with glee. Finally, the moment she had been waiting for so long was approaching.

"My dear son..." She whispered, intoxicated with joy.

"You will have the most wonderful coronation in the world, Jongin."

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## Chapter 106

### Chapter 106 - Five Kisses

She slept deeply, without nightmares. Jennie woke feeling refreshed, though she was a little startled when she opened her eyes. Her surroundings were unfamiliar, but there was also a pair of arms wrapped around her body, hugging her from behind.

The man's soft breath tickled her ear and though she was only wearing a thin nightgown and partially covered by the blanket, she didn't feel cold at all.

"....."

Jennie opened her mouth to speak, but reconsidered. After a moment's uncertainty, she bit her lip and cautiously tried to move away. Her hands looked very white compared to the tanned skin of his arms.

".....!"

Just as she was about to move away, the hands wrapped around her waist and belly moved upward over her breasts. At Jennie's gasp of astonishment, he rubbed her breasts and kissed the back of her neck. His deep voice spoke.

"Are you already awake?"

Liam was smiling at her when she turned around, his eyes slightly mischievous.

"How... long have I been asleep?"

"A little over a day."

Fortunately, she hadn't slept for several days this time. Slowly, she nodded. His golden eyes stared at her, measuring. She still looked a little sleepy.

Liam licked his lips. His gaze moved to her breasts, her nipples

protruding through the thin nightgown.

When she saw him looking, Jennie covered them with her hands.

Frowning discontentedly, he rose, reaching for a nearby jug to drink some water, and then extended it to Jennie. It was an inconceivable thing to do, drinking straight from a jug, contrary to all Estian manners, but Jennie lifted it to her lips. Those things didn't matter. She wasn't in Estia anymore.

The stream of water flowing down her dry throat felt refreshing. As soon as she was finished, Liam kissed and hugged her, biting her lips.

"Starting today, we have to kiss five times a day," he whispered.

"Five times...?"

"It's mandatory, Jennie," he said softly. Jennie nodded automatically, still a little dazed. "It seems my bodily fluids help with your spells."

".....?"

"You can't do that every day, right? That's why we have to kiss." He ran his fingers gently over her lips.

"Of course, if it's okay with you, I can do it every day to help you."

It wouldn't be okay, she was still sore from the last time. If they had sex every night, she really might die. Liam smiled at her reproachful expression. At that moment, there was a polite knock at the door.

"Master Liam. It's urgent." The sound of the voice made Liam frown, and he clicked his tongue as he rose from the bed.

"I won't be able to have breakfast with you. I will send you food with Genin, you must eat. If you want we can have lunch together later."

Liam slid into a robe and then bent to kiss her forehead, then her nose, and then her lips.

"I'd like to stay with you." Her eyes widened, and he smiled. "But it can't be avoided."

He cupped her cheeks in both hands.

"I'm busy preparing a gift for you."

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## Chapter 107

### Chapter 107 - Kurkan Marriage

"What gift?" He had already given her so much. Jennie couldn't imagine what unreasonable gift he was preparing now.

But Liam said nothing more and quickly disappeared before Jennie could say she didn't want it. Jennie lay back down on the soft bed.

There was no longer any need to worry about matters of state, endless documents, or fear meeting Jongin or Cerdina. There was nothing before her but leisure. For a time, she simply relaxed, until someone knocked at the door.

"Jennie, it's Genin."

Jennie quickly pulled a robe on over her nightgown.

"Come in," she said.

Genin appeared holding a tray in both hands. She bowed her head in thanks to the Kurkan holding the door for her, but when he tried to poke his head into the room, she immediately kicked him out. There was a cry.

"Argh!"

In the hallway, there was the sound of someone hitting the floor. Genin closed the door with her foot deliberately and then approached with the tray, filled with towers of food.

"Good morning, Jennie. I've brought delicious food."

"Hello Genin," Jennie greeted Genin cheerfully.

"Thank you so much."

Carefully, Genin placed the tray on the nightstand beside the bed.

"You can talk to me as you like, Jennie," Genin said firmly. "From

now on, you can speak with anyone you meet. In the desert, there is no one more honorable than you."

"But..." She hesitated.

"It's related to Liam's reputation," Genin insisted. It seemed that she must. Genin stared at her, as if waiting for affirmation.

"I understand, Genin," Jennie answered hesitantly.

Genin looked satisfied and promptly placed the tray filled with food in front of Jennie, neatly setting a fork and knife beside the plates. She did not forget to mention that the cutlery had been custom-made for Jennie.

Perhaps because of Liam's tormenting, she had a big appetite. She also had a clearer mind today than she had had for a long time. She felt refreshed, and there were no bad thoughts. For once, she could eat with enthusiasm.

Jennie's shoulders twitched when she tasted a very sweet jam made from palm dates, and she set it down in favor of seasoned chickpeas. While she diligently ate, Genin's hands were busy setting out tempting new dishes. The Kurkan woman was barely restraining the urge to ask Jennie to taste this or that.

While Jennie ate diligently, Genin kept moving her hands. She seemed to be barely restraining her urge to intrude and forced herself to make other conversation instead as Jennie ate. While she tried to keep it casual, with talk of the weather and explanations of daily life in Kurkan, but Jennie's daily life could not be considered normal. Inevitably, they wound around to the topic of bride kidnapping.

"Bride kidnapping is the last resort," Genin explained. It was only used as a last resort when there were obstacles to getting married, despite the shared feelings of the couple involved. On the mainland, it was difficult for someone to marry a Kurkan when they were despised as barbarians.

When Kurkans kidnapped brides, those women were given time to choose whether they wished to return home or to marry. According

to Genin, so far, none of them had returned.

"I also experienced bride kidnapping," Genin added.

Jennie could see a little embarrassment in Genin's face whenever her husband was mentioned, a little blushing. Genin confided that since it had been so long since she had been home, she had brought him flowers. Jennie smiled.

"Does your husband like flowers?" she asked.

"Yes, very much. He liked to garden as a hobby, but now...it's a bit difficult..." Darkness flashed through Genin's face, disappearing quickly. "He is curious to meet you."

Genin said she had proudly told her husband all about Jennie, so he was very curious. Jennie said that she was nothing to be proud of, but accepted nonetheless. She was also curious about Genin's husband. The discussion led very naturally to marriage, and Genin explained the Kurkan customs.

"There is a ceremony for the two of you to welcome each other as a couple. If you plan to have the ceremony, you need at least a month to prepare." Genin said seriously. Lead had to gain weight and exercise to improve her stamina. "Because... a Kurkan wedding doesn't end in one day."

Before the ceremony began, they would have to spend five nights together. On the last day, a wedding would take place in which they would swear fidelity in front of the guests.

Jennie also sobered when she heard that they would have to spend five nights together. Genin frowned.

"Remember the other full moon day?" she asked.

"It'll be harder than then."

"Harder than then...?"

"Yes."

Oh my god. The thought was so shocking, Jennie dropped her fork.

"Of course, I'm saying all of this assuming you become his partner..." Genin added reluctantly. It wasn't something she wanted to say.

"I want to be."

Genin swallowed in surprise.

"I want to become his partner," Jennie continued softly. "I want to be the Queen of the Kurkans..."

Her voice faded away.

"Everyone will be happy," Genin interjected quickly, her eyes sparkling. "Please tell Liam yourself later."

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After breakfast, Jennie listened to her schedule for the day.

She would eat lunch with Liam, and then meet with Morga and the other Kurkan sorcerers. Afterward, she was to do nothing else at all, except perhaps to wander.

Jennie had no intention of doing that. If she wanted to settle in this place, she needed to learn its language and culture. She wanted to learn Kurkan.

Genin promised that a professor would come the next day to begin teach her.

With her schedule arranged, Genin helped her wash and change her clothes. Though it was a little awkward, Genin was able to attend Jennie well enough.

Jennie stroked the skirt of her dress. Unlike Estia, where soft, pastel fabrics were used, the Kurkan style used many fabrics in vivid primary colors.

"I'm sorry," Genin apologized as she pinned jewels in Jennie's hair. "There is fierce competition to fill the position of ladies-in-waiting to

serve you..."

But it would take time, so Genin promised to serve her in the meantime, even if she was not ideal. When she assured her that only the strongest ladies-in-waiting would be allowed to serve her, Jennie laughed.

"Is there somewhere I can pick flowers?" Jennie asked, surreptitiously rearranging the accessories Genin had clumsily put in her hair.

Now that she thought about it, Liam had always proposed to her. She had never given him a proper answer, but this time she would tell him directly, as Genin had suggested.

It had always been hard for her to express her true feelings. But since Liam was trying so hard for her, she wanted to change. With Genin beside her, she went to walk and find flowers to pick.

"....."

Several pairs of eyes glowed at the corner of the long hall as they approached, but as soon as they made eye contact with Jennie, they quickly disappeared.

All the way to the garden, she continued to see Kurkans hiding here and then, vanishing as soon as she saw them. There was even a Kurkan hanging from the ceiling in one room, who ran away as soon as Genin spotted him.

Jennie didn't understand why they all kept hiding and sneaking glances at her. Had Liam told them anything else?

It was very interesting to be able to see the palace, since there hadn't been much time to look when she first arrived. The cool shadows were pleasant. She had heard the western desert was hot, but the palace itself felt cool, probably because of all the vegetation.

"If you see a flower you like, feel free to pick it," Genin said as she collared some Kurkans hiding in the bushes and threw them down the hallway. Jennie looked out into the garden, holding back her laughter.

And she wondered how there could be vegetation in this place at all, when it was surrounded by barren, sandy desert. Among all the exotic plants, here and there she saw flowers that she knew. Pausing in front of some pink peonies that had not yet fully bloomed.

After much deliberation, she plucked the one that looked prettiest.

"Jennie."

Someone suddenly hugged her tightly from behind, and she turned her head back, startled.

Liam was smiling. She had meant to go visit him in his office; she hadn't expected him to come looking for her. Genin had already tactfully vanished.

"Do you like peonies? I'll have to tell them to plant more."

Jennie's lips quivered as she clutched her peony.

Even though she had decided to tell her, she was embarrassed now. Liam rested his chin on top of her head.

"There are still four kisses to go today..." he said.

"Before that, I have something to tell you, Liam."

Jennie turned to face him, her hands trembling as she offered him the peony. He looked at the shaking flower with surprise.

"Take me as your wife," Jennie said as her face turned pinker than the peony.

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## Chapter 108

### Chapter 108 — Li

A warm breeze blew gently in the sunlight as Jennie waited for his answer, with a fresh scent rising from the nearby peonies.

Liam was silently staring at her, wide-eyed, and anxiety filled her. Her heart pounded at the thought that he might refuse her. Now that she had said it, she couldn't understand how Liam had told her something so frightening, and done it several times.

She was so nervous it felt as if her heart would burst.

Jennie pursed her lips.

"...Ahh." Liam sighed. "Really...you're very capricious..."

His hand caressed her face and he took the peony from her trembling hand. His gaze was steady as he slowly bent to kiss her. Jennie's eyes closed as she unconsciously held her breath in anticipation. His lips touched hers. He gently brushed them, and slowly moved in with his tongue, briefly slipping it into her mouth to taste her, then withdrawing to kiss her passionately.

Jennie clung to his body, accepting all of him. A faint moan escaped him as he kissed her, so wildly that she leaned backwards, as if she would fall. Gasping, Jennie pulled away.

"Oh, wait..."

She was worried someone would see them, but as soon as he was sure she had caught her breath, Liam kissed her again, his hands caressing her everywhere. It seemed they would complete their quota for kissing now.

Jennie pulled her lips away again.

"Li, Liam...!"

Liam seemed to collect himself a little, but he didn't let her go. He

turned his head, rubbing his face into her neck until she tingled all over.

"We should have a wedding," he murmured. "Invite everyone in the desert and make it really festive..."

Slowly, he raised his head, his golden eyes so filled with happiness that Jennie couldn't help smiling. She was glad she could make him so happy.

When was the last time she had smiled like this? She couldn't even remember. Startled, Liam touched her smiling lips with his fingertips. He had never seen her with such a radiant smile.

He couldn't resist kissing her again.

"My fiancée," he whispered.

He was entitled to call her that now, but she still felt embarrassed. Instead of speaking, she softly bit his lower lip. He descended on her again, biting her lips gently, but stopped himself quickly, worried that her lips might swell.

"Let's have lunch." He held Jennie in one arm and the peony in his other hand. "To have a wedding ceremony, you must eat like a Kurkan today."

Jennie tilted her face back to the sky. From the position of the sun, it seemed a little early for lunch, and very early for someone who should be working.

Liam glanced at her through narrowed eyes.

"Ahh, it's been a hard day's work," he said wryly. And since they had found each other early, he offered to show her around his office. Jennie claimed to be very curious about them.

The walk to the office was much quieter. When she was with Genin, there were Kurkans actually hiding in the bushes, but now she didn't see any of them. It seemed they had all fled, fearing Liam. Tomorrow, she should greet them, Jennie thought, hugging Liam as he carried her to the office.



It looked completely different from the bedroom.

There were no curtains to divide the space up; it was completely open and sparsely decorated, except for a large curved sword on display. The scabbard was decorated with gold and jewels.

Before a series of arched windows sat a desk, and Liam took his seat there, holding Jennie in his lap and pushing all the scattered papers aside roughly.

All of them were written in Kurkan. Jennie picked up a blank piece of paper.

"How do you write your name?" she asked.

Liam picked up a quill to write, and Jennie looked closely at the name, written carefully in large letters.

His quill was too big for her small hand, but she awkwardly copied his name.

"Originally my name is supposed to be Li," Liam said suddenly as he watched her write.

'That short', Jennie thought.

She had never known that. Jennie set the quill down and looked up at him.

Softly, Jennie spoke his original name.

"Li..." He laughed. "Now no one can call me that name."

No one in the desert would dare call him Li, but Jennie repeated the name again in her mind. It made her imagine him as a child. That this man, who was as solid and robust as an oak, had once been a little sprout named Li...

"It's okay," Liam said, drawing her back out of her imagination as he hugged her and kissed her cheek. "But don't call me that too often. If you call me Li..."

His mischievous smile spoke for itself. Jennie didn't understand why it was so exciting for him when she called him Li, but she only thought that Kurkans were different from humans and set the matter aside. It seemed dangerous to continue this subject.

"What's the urgent job you had this morning?" she asked.

Liam was silent for a moment.

"You should know I killed my predecessor to take the throne," he said, looking away. Taking the paper on which Jennie had written his name, he put it into a desk drawer. "There is a remnant group that followed the former King...It is said that they have allied with Seokjin of Oberde. It seems that Seokjin will try to retrieve his kidnapped bride."

Liam looked at her seriously.

"The time has come to show him who your real husband is."

Hearing the word husband leave his lips without any hesitation embarrassed her. Jennie nodded, her cheeks flushing, and he caressed her reddened cheek with a smile. Her lips parted to speak, but she closed them.

It seemed that there was something else besides the matter of Seokjin.

She thought Liam was hiding something.

She wanted to ask what it was, but she didn't have the courage. She didn't want to ruin this happiness.

Even if it was just a dream...

Jennie closed her eyes. The sound of chains echoed faintly in her ears, and faded.

\*\*\*

Seokjin ruled the western frontier. For a long time, he had been massing troops there to prevent invasion by the Kurkans and in so

doing, gained great wealth, power and fame.

Once he reached a position where even the King could not treat him carelessly, Seokjin felt he deserved a reward for his dedication to Estia. The reward would be the person he had long desired. The Princess.

Her beauty was known not only in Estia, but through the whole of the continent. She had the elegant silver hair and beautiful purple eyes of the royal family. Estian nobles boasted of her beauty in other countries. Of course Seokjin became interested in her.

When she finally became his fiancée, he had thought all that remained was the wedding. But everything had begun to go wrong when that barbarian appeared.

The new King of barbarians.

Unlike the former King, with whom he had gotten along well, the new King was very fierce and savage. Ever since he ascended the throne, Seokjin's forces had suffered defeat in all the battles in the frontier.

Slave traders began to complain about the difficulty in acquiring barbarian slaves. It was all very upsetting.

But that wasn't all. The King had suddenly come to Estia seeking peace and began to lust after the Princess. Seokjin couldn't let him steal her from him, when she was the reward he had been waiting for.

The barbarians had finally crossed the line. They ambushed the wedding procession heading for the western border and kidnapped his Princess.

His anger could not be expressed with words. But while he was searching for a way to retrieve her, a new group of barbarians paid him a visit, claiming to be loyal followers of the former Kurkan king. They made a very interesting proposal.

"We will return the Princess to you."

They only wanted revenge. They would retrieve his kidnapped bride, avenge themselves against the current King, and then flee far away. Though they demanded a large fortune in return, that was not a problem for Seokjin.

"All right, I will comply with what you want. So, no matter what methods..." Seokjin's eyes gleamed.

"Bring the Princess before me."

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## Chapter 109

### Chapter 109 — Wasn't In Vain

Jennie decided not to worry about what Liam might be hiding. It was enough to concentrate on Seokjin.

She believed he wouldn't passively accept what had happened. She had assumed that he would gather his troops to attack immediately, but he had been more patient than she expected. Given his temperament, his reaction was almost too moderate.

But he had been colluding with the followers of the former King of Kurkan. That was strange from a man who had always despised Kurkans and called them barbarians. Suddenly, she wondered.

Had he really successfully defended the frontier with the Kurkans? The eyes of the royals had never reached as far as the western frontier. They had always believed what Seokjin told them. More than once, Jennie had tried to inquire herself, but there was little information that could be obtained within the palace, and she didn't have the resources to look deeper into the matter herself. She had decided to focus her efforts elsewhere.

In retrospect, everything had changed drastically the moment Liam had killed the former King and took the throne. Perhaps there was something more to the truth.

"I've come to find you, Jennie," said Haban. Since Liam and Genin were both busy, Haban had come to take her to the Kurkan sorcerers.

They talked of many things on the way there, and when Haban casually mentioned how busy everyone was preparing for an expedition, Jennie swallowed hard. She didn't need to ask where they were going, but it was a shocking thought to her. An expedition to Estia, no doubt.

When Liam had said he would give her a gift, was this what he meant? He was always doing things she would never have imagined him doing.

"We plan to spill as little blood as possible," Haban added as he looked at Jennie's face. "There are still many things to do. The date for the expedition was set for a month from now, but I think it will be later."

By things to do, he must mean Seokjin. It would be best to take the opportunity to deal with him, but if they focused all their efforts there, it could result in the Estian royal family escaping. The better strategy would be to press just enough to keep Seokjin busy.

That was probably what Liam would do.

"....."

Haban hummed as he walked on, and Jennie gripped the skirt of her dress in her fingers. Her heart was pounding at the mention of Estia, and she heard the rattle of chains in her ears. It was a small sound, faint, but felt so real Jennie had to resist the urge to cover her ears. Subtly, she lifted the hem of her skirt to make sure nothing was tied around her ankles.

She thought of Liam. She was in the desert, in Liam's land. Even if there had been chains on her ankles, it would be because Liam had put them there.

"Oh, and I heard you're getting married," Haban added excitedly, bringing Jennie back to herself. She had been imagining golden eyes. "There will probably be a wedding first, so it may be two months before the expedition."

Apparently the news of the wedding had spread quickly.

His happiness calmed her anxiety. Jennie banished her unnecessary thoughts and silently followed him.

After a while, they arrived at a spacious hall that Haban explained was originally a banquet hall. Now it was filled with medicinal herbs, crystal orbs, books, braziers, and many other things, and in the center were several Kurkans debating fiercely.

"Jennie!" Morga noticed her first and quickly came to greet her. The other sorcerers quickly followed, surrounding her. Among all the

Kurkans, they were the thirteen most powerful sorcerers.

They had been given permission to look at Jennie, so they surrounded her, unblinking, staring at her silver hair.

"It's an honor to meet you, Jennie..." They finally said in very soft voices.

Jennie smiled and waved a hand.

"You can talk to me normally."

It appeared she wouldn't break. The sorcerers raised their voices slightly to greet her again.

"Today we will try to find out what kind of spells you have," said Morga. "We will find a solution, you can trust me."

Jennie nodded at his words, and one of the other sorcerers turned and called out to her.

"Jennie!" His eyes filled as he approached. It wasn't just sympathy. He was looking at her as if he were looking at a god. "My daughter was taken as a slave. But thanks to you, she was able to return to the desert." His voice was thick with tears. "Thank you for this chance to repay my debt."

The words made her feel strange. All this time, she had thought that everything she had done as Princess had been in vain, erased when she was handed over to Seokjin.

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## Chapter 110

### Chapter 110 — Irreversible Past

But it wasn't so. The ripples from the changes she caused continued, even when she couldn't see them.

The hard road she had traveled had not been in vain.

That meant so much to her and satisfied something so deep inside her that Jennie couldn't help smiling, and the Kurkans' eyes grew wide at the sight. There was a sound of astonishment as they stared.

"Oh..."

Haban clapped his hands.

"Come on, let's get to work!"

The sorcerers immediately began their final preparations, drawing intricate patterns on the floor as they discussed them among themselves. As she waited for them to finish, Jennie murmured to Haban.

"Am I so strange?" She asked. "Genin told me that sometimes Kurkans marry people from other parts of the continent, like her husband."

"Of course, but..." Haban pondered for a moment. "There is no one as white as you. Also, since your hair is silver, it makes you even more striking."

"I see."

"Also, you're a very beautiful woman." Jennie almost nodded without thinking, but caught herself. Haban grinned like a naughty boy. "And it's not common to marry someone who's not a Kurkan. Genin's husband doesn't come out often. I'm sure there aren't many Kurkans who know what he looks like."

Jennie blinked. Suddenly she remembered the grim expression that had flickered through Genin's face when she spoke of her husband.



"...By any chance, has anything happened to them?" she asked carefully.

"That..."

"If it's something complicated, you don't need to tell me." She added immediately.

Haban pressed his cheeks with his hands and sighed. "You'd find out soon enough that I'll tell you."

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Among the Kurkans, there were purists. They believed that Kurkans shouldn't interbreed with the people of the mainland, and should only marry among themselves to preserve the purity of their blood. They were proud of the powerful beast blood that spoke of their true nature. They condemned marriages with the peoples of the rest of the continent.

The former King was a purist. Due to the great power in his blood, from birth he was considered the next king, and as soon as his coming of age ceremony was completed, he began a struggle for dominance and ultimately ascended the throne.

The moment he took the throne, the tragedy began.

The King despised half-breeds and openly discriminated against the non-Kurkans who had been brought from other parts of the continent.

Though at first he only treated them contemptuously, as he consolidated power, his actions became more extreme. The purists who supported him walked arrogantly through the desert, and the Kurkans who had married non-Kurkans began to worry for the safety of their partners.

Genin and Haban, escorts of the King, hated the change in his behavior. It came to a head when they learned that the King was selling Kurkans to Seokjin and other slave traders.

He sold half-breeds for a lot of money. And not once or twice, but constantly. Genin and Haban protested furiously, but their protests

had no effect. The King was a tyrant, and the purists supported him.

Genin's fear for her husband increased every day, and finally she decided to leave the desert where she had lived all her life. Haban decided to go with her, sickened by the King and his followers.

They were caught before they had to escape. It was a day Genin would never forget. The price they paid was very great.

*—Please... no, please...!*

That was the day Genin bowed her head to the man she hated so much. She begged, beating her forehead on the ground.

*—Please punish me, please, King, have mercy...!*

But the cruel nature of the King did not grant forgiveness. He showed Genin the consequences of her betrayal.

*—No...no...*

Genin stared. She stared until her eyes reddened and the vessels there ruptured. She stared until tears of blood flowed down her cheeks.

Every time she thought of that day, Genin's mind went blank and vague. What she had done was irreversible. All she could do was regret.

"I have arrived." Genin said as she opened the door.

The man in the flower garden replied cheerfully and moved toward her, pushing his wheelchair. Genin looked away in embarrassment and thrust out a bouquet of flowers to him. His eyes widened.

"I picked them on the way here," she said.

"Genin!" He took the bouquet of peonies in surprise.

"It hasn't been long since the last bouquet of flowers."

"Peonies are beautiful. They're also one of Jennie's favorite flowers."

"I see." He smiled softly and smelled the flowers, then extended his

arm to Genin. With the ease of practice, she lifted him.

The blanket covering his lap fell to the floor, and his pant legs dangled, empty.

He had no legs.

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## Chapter 111

### Chapter 111 - Plans of Seokjin

The King's office suited Liam perfectly.

Everything was built to his size and seemed to reflect his nature, being composed of dark colors, quiet and cold, with small points of colored decorations. A normal person would feel somewhat uncomfortable sitting there.

But today there was a small vase on his desk, incongruous in the forbidding space. Every so often, Liam would look at the peony in the vase and smile to himself.

The white quill in his hand was made from the left wing of a swan. Common quills were made from goose feathers, and swan quills were considered superior in quality, with the left wing generally more expensive. The feathers on a swan's left wing were slanted to the right and easier for right-handed people to use.

The price also depended on the size, and this batch of swan quills were a little smaller than usual. With a small dagger, Liam deftly trimmed the end of his quill.

"Where is Jennie?" He asked.

"I took her to her room," Haban answered quickly.

"She was too tired. She fell asleep right away."

He stood in front of Liam to make his report. They had used spells to try to find out what kinds of spells had been cast on Jennie. Although the burden on her weakened body had been a little excessive, they had no choice.

"Morga said she'll probably sleep for three or four days."

The sound of the sharp blade trimming the end of the quill filled the office.

"The news," Haban said after a long silence. "Will you tell her when she wakes up?"

"Probably."

The King of Estia was dead. The news had come that morning by messenger bird. Liam had told Jennie that the morning's tension was because of Seokjin, but though Jennie might not have been close to the King of Estia, he was still her father. Liam knew he had to tell her, and he had really intended to do it today. After he had fed her a delicious lunch, he meant to carefully tell the news.

But then Jennie had asked to be his wife, and Liam couldn't bring himself to tell her.

She had looked so happy when she smiled. Even if it was just for a day, he wanted her to smile. Even more so, knowing how unstable she was.

Haban understood Liam's mind and moved on with his report.

"They have gone deep into the desert, but surely they will not dare to invade us. Most likely the former King's followers will try to kidnap Jennie, then escape using soldiers as shields," Haban said mockingly. "When they enter the desert, Seokjin's luck will end."

Liam examined the end of his quill. The end was finely cut, and he picked up the next quill.

"I think I will give this to Genin," he said.

Haban swallowed hard.

"It worries me a little," he said carefully. Haban knew Genin's old wounds. He worried she might make a mistake, an emotional decision. This wasn't just about eradicating the old King's followers. It involved Jennie.

"I must give her a chance," Liam replied. "I killed the former King. I'll go with you instead."

"I will plan for that. What do you plan to do with Seokjin?"

Liam neatly picked up the sharpened quills.

"It's uncivilized to wait for the wedding night to give my bride a gift."

Haban blinked at the unexpected reply, then realized what he meant. Liam smiled softly.

"I'll have to give her a smaller one early."

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## Chapter 112

### Chapter 112 — Seokjin Kidnapping

Seokjin was an unpleasant man, but until now Jennie had at least recognized his abilities, since he had kept the Kurkans at bay for so long on the western frontier. But it had all been a lie.

More, she had discovered that Liam had not only ascended the throne in a dominance struggle, but had gathered other Kurkans to rebel against the tyranny of the old King. It made her look at him with new eyes. She wanted to know more about Liam. She wondered what his life had been like, and how he had become what he was.

"....."

Slowly, Jennie opened her eyes. She felt as if she had been sleeping for a long time. Morga had told her she wouldn't wake up for three or four days, so she guessed it had been at least that long.

Reaching for a jug of water on the nightstand, she found a box on it tied with a pretty bow, and a note beside it. She drank first, then picked up the box and note. There was only one word written on the paper.

[Gift.]

Jennie smiled at the fierce handwriting, then untied the bow and opened the box. The swan feather quills inside were much smaller than the one she had used in Liam's office. Picking one up, she laughed.

It was exactly the right size for her hand. He must have thought of this gift after seeing her write with his quill.

Jennie couldn't make herself put it down for a long time. She felt so incredibly happy. And maybe this would be the last time. After so much joy, she worried that a descent back into hell was inevitable.

Jennie shook her head, trying to shake away the anxiety. She kept having these bad thoughts. She set the quill on the nightstand.

"Don't you like it?" Jennie turned in time to see Liam approaching to hug her, and buried her face in his chest.

"I liked it," she said. "Thank you."

Liam's eyes curved as he smiled, and he wrapped Jennie in a blanket and then picked her up in his arms, walking out into the garden. Under the star-filled sky, she drew a deep breath. She needed the fresh air after being asleep for so long.

When she laid her head on Liam's chest again, she could smell metal, as if a sword had been laid against his skin.

"Liam?" She looked up at him. His golden eyes reflected the moonlight, but the mood in them was dark. Jennie traced his lips with a finger, and his eyes flicked away before returning to her face.

She asked him the question.

"Are you... hiding something from me?"

After a brief silence, Liam spoke calmly.

"The King of Estia is dead."

"....."

Jennie clenched her fists to hide the sudden trembling in her fingers, but Liam had already seen it. Cerdina probably hadn't thought the King worth keeping alive anymore, and decided to remove that which was no longer useful.

Jennie had no affection for her father, but his death shocked her. There was no sadness or regret. What she felt was fear. She knew who Cerdina's next target would be, after killing the King.

Suddenly, the sound of distant chains sounded in her ears, rattling as if they were waiting for her, another auditory hallucination. Jennie drew a slow, deep breath, trying to settle her emotions. Liam's deep voice spoke above her.

"It was decided to discuss the expedition again after the funeral."



It was a last act of courtesy, not because the King was of the royal family of Estia, but because he was Jennie's father.

"I will not attend the funeral," Jennie said firmly in response to this consideration. She didn't even hesitate. But inside, her mind was in chaos. After the funeral, Jongin would take the throne. What would Cerdina do with her son on the throne of a ruined country? Especially if Seokjin decided to seize the initiative and attack...

Please stop.

Even in the Kurkan palace, she was still worrying about the Estian royal family. Jennie forced herself to stop thinking about it, seeking out her happiest thought.

"When will we carry out our wedding?"

Liam stared at her as if he could see in her eyes that she was clinging to this last hope.

"As soon as possible," he answered.

Jennie nodded. She wanted to be tied to Kurkan. It would help her to stop thinking of the bad things.

Jennie had been strolling through the garden throughout their conversation, and came to a halt.

"That's enough walking," he said. "Would you be willing to go outside with me?"

Jennie blinked. She hadn't left the palace since she had arrived.

"You're going to like it," he tempted her. "It will be very interesting."

It didn't sound like they were simply going to look around outside the palace.

"Where do you plan to go...?" Jennie couldn't help asking.

Liam laughed like a mischievous boy. "To kidnap Seokjin."

\*\*\*

The barbarians had said boldly that they would kidnap Princess Jennie. It seemed quite possible.

They were the followers of the former barbarian King and they knew the internal structure of the royal palace. They had suggested that Seokjin lead his men into the desert to meet them, as the other Kurkans would pursue the Princess's kidnappers.

They would lead them into a trap.

Seokjin had foolishly committed to do just that. He didn't know that the kidnappers had an ulterior motive. They would lead their pursuers to Seokjin, but then continue fleeing with the Princess.

He had gathered as many troops as he could to march into the desert immediately. The commander of his knights had strongly opposed the idea, but Seokjin had insisted. He was sure civilized soldiers would easily defeat the barbarians if they faced them properly.

But he regretted it almost as soon as they began to march. He wanted to hold the Princess in his arms as soon as possible, but the wilderness was cruel. It was the first time that he had stayed in the desert for days in a row, and though he was being carried by his attendants, the swift changes in heat and cold were unbearable.

Tonight was no different. In the night sky, the stars flowed like a river, a magnificent sight, but Seokjin was huddled in his tent.

He was sick of the desert. He didn't even want to look at it anymore. He fell asleep muttering curses.

".....?"

Late in the night, he woke up with a start. It was very cold inside his tent. The brazier had burned out, and the oil lamp was dark. He felt a shiver run through his body. In the dark tent, he rose and tried to hurry outside, but...

Something struck the back of his head, and he fell into the dark.

When he came to his senses, he was sitting in a hard wooden chair, tied so tightly that it felt as if his blood wasn't circulating properly. His eyes were blindfolded, but he was not gagged. As he twisted, trying desperately to free himself, he felt someone else's presence.

"Who are you?" He cried out desperately. His lips were dry. "I'll give you all the money you want..."

When the blindfold over his eyes was removed, he was stunned.

"It's been a while, Seokjin," the man said arrogantly.

"You should have been grateful that you hadn't heard from me. Why are you doing unnecessary things? You're making me notice you."

"You, Liam...!" Seokjin looked around quickly. He didn't recognize this tent. He had set out to kidnap the Princess and ended up being kidnapped himself.

He couldn't believe it. Rage filled him.

"But it's not me you're going to speak with today," Liam went on calmly as Seokjin yanked at his restraints. The canvas tent door opened and a woman entered.

Seokjin's eyes opened wide.

Her face was fresh as a flower in full bloom. Her eyes looked more vivid than ever before, bright as amethysts. She was filled with vitality, and her cheeks had color, like peaches.

"Seokjin." She said slowly.

"Princess...?" He muttered, perplexed.

\*\*\*

Liam had talked about kidnapping Seokjin as if it were an evening excursion. His behavior was beyond belief.

"What's the point of kidnapping him...?"

"It's a gift," Liam answered easily. "I can kill him or keep him alive, as you wish..." He whispered with a smile. "I will."

Looking into his golden, glowing eyes, Jennie understood his intentions. What he meant to accomplish was quite simple. He wanted her trust.

Even though he had brought her to the desert, he knew she was anxious and unstable. The Queen was the biggest problem, but that couldn't be solved yet.

So Liam was making an example of Seokjin to prove that he could protect her.

Liam never hesitated. If she asked him to kill Seokjin, he would cut his throat and bring her his head.

But she didn't just want him dead. Death was not enough to pay for everything he had done. Before he died, she would make him pay.

\*\*\*

"....."

Seokjin looked from Liam to Jennie and back again.

"You don't have a relationship with this barbarian, do you?" he asked suddenly.

Jennie didn't need to reply. Her silence spoke for her.

"With a lowly beast?!" He shouted furiously. The wooden chair creaked at his violent struggling, but the tight ropes didn't loosen. They only rasped his skin. "You don't even know," he said through gritted teeth. "He was a slave!"

".....!"

Automatically, Jennie looked at Liam. His eyes darkened, but he said nothing. Watching them, Seokjin spoke with determination.

"You think he's a true king just because he took the throne through a stupid dominance fight. You understand nothing."

The more he spoke, the more Liam's expression darkened. A shadow fell over his face.

"It's not too late, you can return as the Princess of Estia," Seokjin said.  
"I will help you... "

**Slap.**

Jennie slapped his face. Shocked, he slowly turned his head to look at her as Jennie rubbed her throbbing hand. She had slapped him with all her might.

"It's you who doesn't understand." Jennie leaned down to bring her face close to his, and he held his breath. "You've been fooling everyone."

"That..."

"Was it fun playing the hero?"

His mouth opened. His voice cracked as he spoke.

"What the hell, I sacrificed myself on the western frontier..."

It seemed he had still not come to his senses. Jennie wanted to slap him again, but her hand was reddened and swelling from the first slap.

Liam had been watching silently, but he moved when he saw her hesitating. He knew exactly what she wanted. His large hand smacked across Seokjin's cheek. The man went flying, still tied to the chair, to the corner of the tent.

"Oh, whoops." Liam said. "It's not easy to control my strength."

Jennie hurried over to check on Seokjin. She was worried Liam might have broken his neck, but fortunately he was still alive. Liam dragged the squirming Seokjin back to the center of the tent.

He was not in the whole of his senses. Saliva flowed from his mouth and his face was swollen. It was a pathetic appearance for Seokjin, who commanded the western frontier.

"You're still useful, Seokjin." Jennie extended a suspicious glass of dark red wine to him and said coldly, "Drink it, if you don't want to die."

"You can't kill me!" he screamed wildly.

"What makes you think I can't?"

"....."

There was no difference between dying from the wine and dying some other way. In that case, it was better to take the option that at least offered a chance. Seokjin drank the wine.

After she had ensured he had drunk it all, Jennie revealed the nature of the wine.

"It's a potion that can cause your immediate death if you disobey my commands."

"Huh, really..."

"You will be risking your life if you want to test it." His mouth fell open. Jennie looked at him coldly.

"From now on, you will be my spy, Seokjin."

\*\*\*

For Jennie, who had decided to become the Queen of Kurkan, it was worth it to keep him alive. Before the conquest, it would be necessary to plant as many Kurkans as possible inside Estia, especially since she didn't know what Cerdina would do. Jennie wanted to know what was happening in the capital.

The funeral would be a good excuse for Seokjin to go there. He could delve deeper into Estia's politics than any of the nobles the Kurkans had bribed.

Leaving the dejected man behind, Jennie met Liam outside the tent. Several Kurkans bowed and went into the tent to return Seokjin properly. She looked away for a moment, and then looked up at Liam as he gently stroked her swollen hand with his fingers.

"I didn't know there was such a strange potion." He smiled. "I have never heard of it."

"It was a lie."

Once Jennie realized how greatly they had overestimated Seokjin, she had a much more accurate idea of his true ability. She thought he would be deceived even by a lie of that magnitude.

That fearful man would never dare to test her threat.

"You really are..." Liam was speechless for a moment, and then burst out laughing. "I had forgotten that you once pretended to be a slave trader."

This was nothing to Jennie. She was curious about other things, but she didn't dare ask him directly.

She wanted to know about his past before he took the throne, when he was called Li. Now that she thought about it, she didn't know much about him. It made her suddenly feel far from him.

"It's a boring story." She looked up at the sound of his voice. Liam had a strange smile. "You'll have to pay a significant price to hear it."

"How did you know I wanted to ask..."

"You're curious about my past."

"...Yes." She hesitated and asked. "Can you tell me about it?"

"No."

Her eyes widened at the firm refusal. He lifted her swollen hand and kissed it.

"You know that, Jennie," he whispered softly.





## Chapter 113

### Chapter 113 — Genin Revenge

What did he mean, she already knew? Had they met in the past? But if she had ever met Liam, she couldn't have forgotten him. Jennie looked silently at the man before her.

He had sharp features. Illuminated by the moonlight, that face was superior to any face she had ever seen, even among Kurkans. She would never forget that face even if she had wanted to.

But Liam didn't seem willing to discuss the matter further. He lifted her in his arms and changed the subject.

"Enough of this boring talk," he said, assuming a mischievous expression. "There are things to do, Jennie. I have to kiss you, and there are things you need to eat."

"....."

Jennie wanted to speak, but no words emerged.

Liam smiled at her reaction.

"A tent has been set up for us, so we will sleep there tonight, outside the city."

She didn't care where she slept, as long as it was with him. At her nod, Liam walked toward another tent. As he carried her there, he murmured something she didn't understand.

"...The royal palace will be a bit noisy today."

\*\*\*

Under the dim moonlight, Genin breathed slowly. A burning heat coursed through her entire body and her eyes glowed, eerie.

Flesh and blood were scattered and splashed everywhere. Amidst the carnage, only disembodied heads were identifiable on the ground.

The purist Kurkans, followers of the dead king, had come to a miserable end. The ghastly expressions on their faces were proof of the torment of their deaths.

For hours, Genin gazed at the mangled bodies, covered in blood. When she had learned that these people who she had believed were dead were still alive, she couldn't help being glad. Glad that there was still a chance to inflict this pain upon them. But now that it was over, Genin was not happy.

As she sat, lost in thought, a familiar, fresh scent wafted by her. She looked up.

"...Liam," she said, in a broken voice.

He stood with his long pipe in his hands and exhaled a puff of smoke. His golden eyes looked calmly at Genin and the massacre she had committed.

Though the place reeked of blood, he walked toward her and lit a thin cigar, handing it to Genin. Her hand trembled as she took it.

After a few puffs, the tumult of emotions and the predatory gleam in her eyes faded. Genin squeezed her eyes shut.

"....."

Tears spilled from her eyes, streaking through the dried blood on her face, and soon began to patter onto the ground.

They had killed the ones who had cut off her husband's legs before her eyes. But though she had killed them in the most painful way possible, Genin still regretted it. No matter what she did, it wouldn't change the past.

"I promised to protect him...I couldn't," she sobbed.

"Even if I have revenge, nothing will ever be the way it used to be..."

The cigar fell to the ground and she wiped at her tears with the back of her hand.

"I shouldn't have...put him in danger from the beginning..." Genin's teeth gritted as she forced the words out between sobs. "You wouldn't have been as foolish. You would have protected your partner no matter what. I was so stupid..."

"Well, I don't know." Liam exhaled a long puff of smoke. "I'm not a god."

"But..."

"If something like that happened to me, I would feel as you do." Genin listened to him with wet eyes.

"That's why I do everything I can," he said firmly.

"You did everything you could, Genin."

At those words, it felt as if something that had been lodged heavily in her heart vanished. Genin bit her lower lip and knelt on the bloody ground.

"Thank you for giving me this chance."

Really, Genin should not have been handed this task, given the risk that her emotions might get the better of her. Since these Kurkans were invading the royal palace, they had to be dealt with decisively. But Liam had given her this opportunity, so she could finally have revenge. There was only one way Genin could pay this kindness.

"I will serve Lady Leah with all my heart."

Liam laughed softly.

"You must go back. Your husband is surely waiting for you."

He was right, it was time for her to go home. Genin bowed and then began collecting the decapitated heads and stuffing them into a sack. She left with the bloodstained bag on her back.

Though it was a few hours before dawn, when she arrived at her mansion it was still illuminated. The man who had been watching from a window immediately came out into the garden, rapidly

pushing his wheelchair. His eyes widened at the stench of blood that filled the air around her.

"Sorry I'm late." Genin emptied the sack before his chair, the heads thumping onto the ground. "I have killed them. Finally."

His face was rigid as he looked down. He recognized those faces from his dreams. His voice trembled as he whispered.

"...I told you it was okay."

Genin couldn't speak, only shook her head regretfully. Her husband gripped the armrests of his chair. He knew Genin suffered from those memories. He had told her a hundred times that it was all right, to forget about it. Nothing could be done about it...

But she had had her revenge. He understood how she must have felt when she killed him, and why she thought she had to bring them their heads. And so he told Genin what she needed to hear most.

"Thank you." The words made her blink, and he held out his arms to her. "Come here. Let me hug you."

Since he couldn't stand, Genin knelt down and wrapped her arms around his waist, resting her head on his chest. For the first time in a long time, she felt complete peace.

\*\*\*

Until she fell asleep, Jennie had been with Liam. It would have been too much, if he had penetrated her, so they only meant to touch instead, but it really was impossible for him to completely restrain himself.

Liam slid his fingers inside her as he licked every part of her body. She climaxed multiple times, though she didn't know how many, and fell asleep as soon as he made her swallow his semen again.

"....."

When she woke up, she was alone. Liam must have returned to the palace ahead of her because he had work to do. Physically, she did

feel better than usual. It was embarrassing to admit it, but consuming his semen did seem to work.

Lying on the bed in the tent, she wondered about his past. On this subject he had very clearly refused, though Liam rarely told Jennje no. If she had to guess at his past, it was probably related to the slave trade...Jennie frowned. She wouldn't solve anything by guessing. She stopped thinking about it.

Sitting up, she pulled the rope beside her bed.

"Jennie, I'm coming in."

A voice she had never heard before came from outside the tent. The canvas door opened with a flash of sunlight as several Kurkans entered, and the woman in the front bowed.

"From now on, we will serve you. I am Mura, your head lady-in-waiting." Her new ladies had been chosen after a fierce competition. Jennie's eyes widened as she received their greetings.

Mura wore her long hair tied back, revealing a small tattoo next to her left eye that looked familiar. It was the same size and shape as the tattoo beside Haban's right eye.

When she realized what Jennie was looking at, Mura pointed at the tattoo and smiled.

"Haban is my husband. I'd like to make it clear now that I won the position of your head lady-in-waiting on my own merit." Haban had not intervened in the slightest. Mura had won it worthily.

So saying, she neatly placed a hearty breakfast before Jennie on the bed. As usual, it was a full tray.

As Jennie ate, Mura began to explain.

"Please just listen as you eat," she began with a smile. "Your wedding date is set. It will be in two weeks."

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## Chapter 114

### Chapter 114 — Military Meeting

The thought that it was such a short time before the wedding startled her. Liam was organizing their wedding as quickly as she had asked. But now that the date had been set, she felt strange. She didn't dislike it. She was just bewildered at so many changes happening so fast.

"Since everyone is busy planning the wedding, you should build up your stamina in the meantime, Jennie." Even as she spoke, Mura observed which foods Jennie ate most, to learn more about her tastes. "In the evening, you have to meet Morga for treatment."

As Mura kept her distracted with conversation, Jennie didn't realize how much she was eating, and so ended up consuming far more than usual. Liam would have applauded if he could have seen it.

"I will also teach you the Kurkan language. I've studied linguistics, so I should be able to teach you well enough."

Jennie swallowed her mouthful of food. "You won the selection and studied linguistics? Mura, you are amazing."

Mura's eyes widened and her face reddened at the compliment. "Of course!" She said proudly. "I'm...I'm very intelligent...!"

Jennie smiled. For some reason, it made her think that Mura's personality matched Haban's well. After her breakfast, she had hot tea with honey. From the way Mura was looking at her, she thought she was going to try to encourage snacks, but Jennie thought she might explode if she had anything else to eat.

After her tea, she prepared to return to the palace, washed and dressing with the skilled help of the other ladies-in-waiting. They had brought dresses that would fit Jennie, and she tried them on until she found the one she liked the best. While the ladies arranged her, Jennie thought about what she could do for Kurkan.

The first thought that came to mind was to work on palace matters.

She was sure she would be useful in both politics and finance, as she had worked in those areas in Estia. As long as she could adapt to Kurkan, she thought she would do well. But perhaps it was still too early to do so. She had come to the desert as Liam's bride, but she was still a foreigner. If a foreigner tried to move in too quickly, it might cause antipathy among the Kurkans.

Since everything was already well-ordered, it wouldn't be bad for her to slowly begin work after she officially became Queen.

As she was pondering what she could do before then, Jennie suddenly bit her lip.

"....."

The sound of chains rattling filled her ears. She was sick of these insistent sounds, tired of feeling afraid.

Every time she listened to these hallucinations it made her feel as if she were standing on a frozen river. If the ice broke one day, she would plunge into the cold, dark waters.

Jennie looked at her reflection in a mirror. Her face was pale.

Liam was right. This endless anxiety would only go away once the problem was eradicated at its root.

She couldn't live in fear for the rest of her life.

Ignoring the sound of rattling chains, Jennie looked at her ladies-in-waiting.

"Is there to be a meeting today about the conquest of Estia?" She asked with determination. The diligent ladies paused for a moment. They all knew that she had been the Princess of Estia. Mura answered.

"I have heard that there will be a military meeting this afternoon."

"I would like to attend the meeting. But first I need to ask permission..."

"Permission?!" Mura scoffed. Jennie smiled. The agitated attitude was just like Haban's. "There's nothing in the desert you can't do. You don't need to ask anyone's permission."

Mura was very clear about this. Jennie laid her hands on the skirt of her dress, squeezing gently.

Somehow, it made her heart tingle.

In Estia, she had been looked down on by both the royal family and nobility, but here in Kurkan she had priority. It felt strange to be told that she could always do whatever she wanted, it encouraged her to do the best she could. As soon as she was fully dressed and ready, she stood up enthusiastically.

"Can you get me a quill and paper?" She asked. "I'd like the paper to be...large."

Soon, they placed the paper and quill on a table, and after musing for a moment, Jennie picked up the quill and began slowly to draw.

Jennie went straight to the large conference room where the military council was meeting. The palace was so large, she hadn't visited all the rooms near her bedchamber yet, let alone the rest. Someday she would have to explore.

Accompanied by her ladies-in-waiting, she arrived before the conference room, startling the man standing restlessly outside the doors.

"Jennie!"

To be more precise, he was startled by Mura behind her. Mura gave a small smile and pushed open the door with one hand.

"We'll be waiting outside," she said. "Go in, Jennie."

Though Haban tried to discreetly slip after Jennie, Mura stopped him, and Haban looked at Jennie for help. But Jennie pretended not to notice. She didn't want to interfere in the couple's matters.

Holding the large paper rolled up in her arms, Jennie took a deep



breath and walked into the conference room. The chiefs of every tribe were gathered inside, seated at a long ebony wood table.

As soon as she entered, they rose from their seats.

The only one who did not rise was Liam, seated at the head of the table. Slowly, he lowered the pipe from his mouth and smiled.

"Jennie."

Without hesitating, Jennie walked straight to him, and as soon as she sat beside him, he kissed her on the cheek as if he had been waiting for her.

When she saw the chiefs' eyes widening, Jennie gently pushed him away and sat up straight. Several of the chiefs were looking at her as if she was some exotic specimen, since it was the first time they had seen her. Morga nodded to her.

Though she was a little overwhelmed by all the staring, Jennie unrolled the paper she had brought.

She thought it would be best to show it to them before she began speaking.

Their eyes quickly shifted to the page, curiously first, and then all of their expressions turned serious. The paper had an intricate drawing on it, a map of the royal palace of Estia. Jennie tapped it with her fingers.

"I drew this myself," she began, as her white fingers touched certain places on the map. "These highlighted places are secret passages. The knowledge of them is passed down orally only between members of the royal family. This place, this place, and this one, are passages unknown even to the Queen."

She described the best routes to enter the palace.

She told them about the schedules of certain palace employees, and which places would be unoccupied at certain times, among many other things.

"Of course, I don't know much about the military, but I do have a suggestion..." Jennie's fingers moved over the paper to point at the outskirts of the palace.

"Estian security is based on five procedures. The procedures are maintained for a week at a time before they change, so if someone observes for a day, they might be able to tell which of the five is in use."

She also explained how to distinguish the protocols that changed periodically, and even the guard locations that she knew about, with as much detail as possible.

"I don't know when you plan to carry out the conquest...but I would suggest doing it after the funeral." Since the funeral entourage would be composed of knights, that would be the time when most of them were concentrated in the capital. It would be best to wait for them to depart after the funeral.

"And if you plan to take the palace with a small group, then I can provide you with a place to hide, on the outskirts of the capital." Given the striking appearance of Kurkans, it would be difficult for them to infiltrate the palace unnoticed. But if they were moving through slums with no security, it would be easier.

Jennie owned a few mansions near the poor quarters of the capital. She had bought them when she was posing as a slave trader, and had willed them to her ladies-in-waiting on the occasion of her death. But she was not dead. The mansions would surely be intact.

"I suggest using these mansions as your base. And if necessary, you can enter as Kurkan slaves." Jennie finished, unhesitating. She drew a breath. "That is everything I can think of. If you need more information about Estia, you can ask and I will answer."

She knew Estia better than anyone else. She had devoted her whole life to her country. Before the open-mouthed Kurkans, she spoke firmly.

"I remember everything." Into the silence, she added carefully, "I will do my best to help. But in return, I would like to ask that no harm be

done to the people of Estia..." She looked at Liam. "Will there be a new ruler, or will Estia become part of Kurkan...?"

"There will be a new ruler, Jennie." Liam spoke, his eyes smiling. "The successor to the throne of Estia has also been decided."

As her heart pounded, Jennie asked in a trembling voice. "Who is...?"

"You."

Liam kept surprising her. Her lips moved soundlessly, unable to produce words, at such a loss that she tried and failed several times to come up with anything sensible. Finally, she asked the question.

"...You're going to make me Queen of Estia?"

Unlike her hesitant question, his answer was firm.

"Yes. It's a wedding present, Jennie." Liam had decided from the beginning that he would give the country to her. She had left Estia, but her love for her country had not disappeared. Even if the royal family had fallen, she did not want her people to suffer.

That was why she was fully cooperating with their conquest. The Kurkans' rule would be better for her people than tyranny under Jongin, Cerdina, or Seokjin. At least this way, she had influence over the outcome. She believed that this would be the best scenario for Estia.

But Liam's plans were beyond anything Jennie imagined. Still frozen with shock, she looked at the Kurkans. None of them looked surprised. She finally spoke again, with some difficulty.

"But Seokjin was a present..."

"That was just a trinket."

"....."

"You didn't like it?" Liam turned toward her, resting one elbow on the table and propping his chin on his hand. "If you want, I'll get you something else instead."

Jennie quickly shook her head, her heart pounding, and he laughed.

"I told you I'll give you anything you wanted."

Really, there was no limit when he said 'anything'.

His golden eyes were so bright, and she felt her cheeks heat. Quickly, she lowered her head to hide her blush behind her curtain of silver hair.

In that moment, she truly understood the man she was going to marry.

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The meeting continued, but since Jennie was having difficulty concentrating, she decided to leave. Partly because she was embarrassed that Liam was making her blush, but her heart was also pounding so hard, she was sure everyone in the conference room could hear it.

Outside the door, she found Haban and Mura conversing. There was a stark contrast between the somber Haban and the vain Mura. Haban looked as if the sight of Jennie had brought him back to life.

"Jennie!"

Automatically, Jennie looked around for Genin, and Haban smiled.

"Genin has the day off today. But don't worry, I alone can serve Liam perfectly."

It seemed that he wanted Jennie to take Mura away quickly, but there was regret in his eyes as she took her leave. Mura's goodbye was impeccable.

"Good luck, Haban."

"...See you later, Mura."

Haban's eyes were filled with lingering feelings. They seemed like an interesting couple. If there was ever time, Jennie would have liked to

ask them how they met and married.

\*\*\*

After rest and supper, Jennie headed to the hall to meet Morga. As soon as she entered the hall, she noticed that her ladies-in-waiting didn't seem to like Morga. She didn't know why, but even though they always tried to be near Jennie, when she spoke with Morga they preferred to stay away. Leaving them at the door, she approached the sorcerer.

The hall was more chaotic than her last visit. The magic pattern on the floor was larger, and in one corner of the hall various objects were accumulating.

Where there had been one large brazier, there were now eight braziers surrounding the magic pattern.

The braziers were filled with branches and leaves, and gave off the aroma of tobacco that Liam often smoked.

If there was any other difference, it was that last time there had been many sorcerers present, but this time there was only Morga. Standing alone in the center of the hall, he gazed intently at a map of zodiac constellations.

"Aries and Leo..." He muttered with a serious expression. "No, Scorpio..."

He was concentrating so intently, he didn't look up until Jennie was right in front of him.

"You've come." He greeted her with great joy.

"Everyone was amazed during the military council."

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## Chapter 115

### Chapter 115 — She Can't Get Pregnant

Morga repeatedly praised her for everything from her memorization of the complicated floorplan of the Estian palace to her map drawing and everything else she had said at the meeting.

"I also heard that you made Seokjin your spy." He was surprised that she had thought of lying about the effects of a potion.

Jennie bit her lip, embarrassed. She was not used to compliments, and as his praises went on and on, Morga only belatedly came to his senses.

"It's not ready yet, please wait a moment."

Placing a pot of hot water over a brazier, he carefully began to introduce the ingredients that were lined up neatly nearby. Before he added them to the pot, he weighed them on a scale.

"I'm making a potion. Now is the perfect time..." Somehow, he seemed a little unsure. As he added the last ingredient to the pot, he explained, "There is no law that states that sorcery will work. It changes based on the situation. Even if the same ingredients are used in a potion, the result may vary due to the position of celestial bodies, or the state of the sorcerer, or other factors."

As he watched the pot, he explained that the more skilled the sorcerer, the more likely they were to achieve consistent results.

"Do love potions exist?" Jennie asked curiously.

Listening to his explanations had reminded her of something.

"In theory, they do," Morga answered, stirring the liquid in the pot with a spatula. "But depending on who makes the potion, the effects will vary. Since love potions try to influence emotions...in my case, I can only make aphrodisiacs."

But the love potions sold by the Tomaris were fake.

Having experienced the effects of such a potion in the past, Jennie listened quietly.

"Only a sorcerer with great power can make a true love potion," Morga explained. "But a sorcerer of that level could make anything." Pausing, he grabbed some elaeagnus fruits and added them to the spot and stirred again. "Throughout history, there has only ever been one sorcerer that powerful."

"...I see." Jennie was relieved. She had been thinking of Cerdina.

"Are you worried about the Queen?" Morga looked at her intently. He could see the emotion in her eyes.

Jennie hesitated.

"I hear auditory hallucinations occasionally," she admitted, confessing the thing she hadn't wanted to say. "I can sense that we're still connected."

She trailed off, but Morga understood what she meant.

"Hopefully those symptoms will subside a bit after the ceremony. Please hang in there a little longer."

Jennie nodded slowly.

"Don't worry, Jennie." He said firmly. "We'll protect you."

\*\*\*

The spell he cast this time wasn't as powerful, so Morga said she wouldn't sleep for days, but she was still very tired. As soon as she returned to her room, Jennie fell asleep. She drifted awake to the feel of someone beside her hugging her and called out sleepily.

"Liam..."

"Keep sleeping, Jennie." He whispered.

But she hadn't seen him in more than half a day, and turned around to have a conversation with him. His hair was damp from a recent

washing.

"What food did you have for dinner?" he asked.

"Lamb, and several other things...I ate a lot. My ladies-in-waiting served me very well. And you?"

But instead of answering, he touched her body, his hand caressing her belly.

"You don't look like you've eaten much," he said. His large hand cupped her backside. "You have to choose the dress for the wedding soon. You won't be able to wear it, being so thin."

"I'll try to eat more."

For a while, they talked about the wedding, until she remembered something else she had wanted to ask.

"Will I get pregnant if we do the ceremony?" She was afraid that her weakened body would not be strong enough to carry a child, but she didn't want to admit it even to him. Her voice was casual. "I only ask you to mentally prepare myself."

Liam stared at her for a moment before he answered belatedly.

"If you don't want to, no."

As soon as she heard his answer, she knew the truth.

Her face stiffened. Jennie forced a smile onto her face, trying to seem unconcerned..

"...I can't get pregnant," she whispered softly.

Deep in her heart, she wanted him to deny it. But Liam was silent. Slowly, her forced smile faded, little by little. Jennie could not hide her devastation. She was a bride with a completely shattered body and mind. She couldn't even have children.

Jennie knew how important children were. She had learned that lesson harshly when her mother was expelled from the palace when



she became infertile.

Liam must have known this already and he still said he wanted to marry her. But he was a very powerful king. He would need children to perpetuate his bloodline. Which meant that he would have other women to procreate. The Estian royal family had gone as far as to permit incest if it was necessary to preserve their bloodline.

The terrible thoughts invaded her mind, one after another. If Liam slept with someone else...

"What are you thinking about so hard?" Gently, Liam pinched the tip of her nose. "You don't have to worry about anything."

"....."

He seemed to read every thought going through her mind. Wordlessly, Jennie buried her face in his chest. His warmth calmed her troubled heart. Liam laid his hand on her head comfortingly, caressing her for a while.

"I brought you to the desert to make you happy," he said finally. "Not to have a child."

Jennie looked up into his eyes, surprised.

"You really are the only one. You will be the center of my world." Liam grumbled. "Haven't I shown you that?"

"It's just that in Estia..." Jennie began.

"You're in the desert, not Estia." His lips pressed against her forehead. "You will be the Queen of Kurkan."

He bent his head to kiss her lips. His kiss was gentle.

"Morga told me you could not become pregnant. But there are factors that could influence it that he can't determine, like my peculiar constitution." He hugged her tightly. "With the treatments, you will gradually get better. One day, when the spells are undone, you will be able to get pregnant naturally. Of course, I want to have a baby as soon as possible..."

He suddenly grinned mischievously.

"So I will try to do it until I get it."

".....?"

"Don't worry. Fortunately, I'm very vigorous, so someday you'll have a baby." He shifted above her as she stared at him, wide-eyed. "Why don't we practice?"

The question made her give a small smile, and she forgot everything. His finger gently touched her lips.

"Smile often." His gaze was full of affection. "You look so beautiful when you smile."

It was impossible not to fall in love with those enchanting eyes. Jennie wrapped her arms around his neck to pull him close, and their kiss deepened, and intensified.

Now she thought she understood why Ishakan hadn't told her about his past. Those memories had no bearing on the present. Even if she forgot everything she knew about him and met him all over again...she would still love him. She couldn't help but love this man.

Jennie put aside her questions about his past. There was no hurry to answer them. In all the time they had together in their future, they could get to know each other, little by little.

But deep down she worried that maybe there wouldn't be time.

Jennie's arms tightened around him as she kissed him.

It was a blissfully terrifying night.

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Seokjin had been swearing a lot lately.

He lived to swear, all day long. His attendants whispered behind his back that he had become ruder than ever, but he had his reasons.

The evil Princess had forced him to take a strange potion, and he had no choice to obey her. Of course his temper worsened.

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## Chapter 116

### Chapter 116 — Funeral

Although he had tried personally to find a Tomari who could counteract the strange potion, so far it had been difficult. Everyone tried to trick him with fake antidotes. Looking out the window, Seokjin clicked his tongue.

"Why is the sky so dark...?"

Dark clouds covered the sun, adding a somber cast even to midday. A gray sky suited a funeral. It had been like this ever since Seokjin had arrived in the capital.

After the funeral, he would have to obey the Princess's orders and return quickly. He had already written a rough letter and tied it to the messenger bird that had come from Kurkan, then let it fly.

Dressed in a black suit, he went to the palace for the King's funeral.

All the nobles in Estia were gathered at the burial site, an empty plot in the cemetery behind the palace, where only royalty were buried. It looked like a perfect funeral, between the nobles in their black and the somber weather. After some ceremony, floral offerings for the King followed.

Seokjin was the first nobleman to offer flowers. With a white chrysanthemum in his hand, he approached the coffin where the King's body lay.

Strangely, the King's body lying amidst the white flowers looked more alive now than it had before his death. Looking at the corpse dressed in its ceremonial robe and wearing a crown on its head, he had a bad feeling.

"....."

Seokjin hid his frown as he placed his flower beside the King and returned to his seat. As the other nobles were offering their own flowers, he looked at the first row of chairs. The Queen was wearing

a black gown. Though her face was hidden under a black veil and hat, she did not look that sad.

He had never expected the Queen to cry over the King's death. She was crazy about her son. She was likely just happy about the fact that the Crown Prince would finally ascend to the throne.

But there was no sign of the Crown Prince. The flower offerings were nearly over, and soon it would be time for the funeral speech. Where the hell was he?

Just as he began to complain internally, murmurs rose behind him. He looked back automatically and couldn't believe his eyes.

The Crown Prince was slowly approaching. Amidst the multitudes in black, he was wearing a magnificent royal robe with glittering gold jewelry, and a long red cape that dragged on the grass behind him.

But there was something still more shocking.

"Blond hair?" Seokjin muttered between his teeth.

Instead of the silver hair that was the trademark of the Estian royal family, the Crown Prince's hair was blond. As everyone stood paralyzed and bewildered, he finally reached the coffin.

Looking at his father's corpse through narrowed eyes, the Crown Prince tossed a white chrysanthemum into the coffin. Then he took the crown from the dead King's head and place it on his own. Turning, he looked at the paralyzed nobles.

"Listen, Estia," he said.

Seokjin shuddered in fear. Black smoke rose from the prince's feet. His voice had been clear before, but now it sounded strange and twisted.

*<I'm from the true bloodline of Estia. >*

As soon as he finished speaking, the black smoke rose and completely covered him, right before the wide eyes of the watching nobles. His blond hair had turned silver.

"Oh...!"

There was a shout of happiness, and all eyes went to the Queen. The black smoke enveloping the prince moved to her, swirling, and whipped back the veil, revealing her ecstatic face.

"Ah, finally..." Her face was flushed as she began to inhale the smoke. When all of it had vanished without a trace, she began to laugh wildly.

The watching nobles shouted and turned to run.

"Ahhhhhh!!!"

Seokjin fled with the rest of the frantic nobles. But when he felt a crawling feeling at his back and looked behind him, his eyes widened.

Black smoke spread from the Queen's body in all directions. Anyone it touched immediately stopped.

All emotion vanished from their faces, and blank as dolls, they turned to kneel on the ground, bowing to the Queen.

"What is this, damn it...!" Seokjin was running for his life, but he couldn't outrun the black smoke either. It felt as if someone grabbed his brain and shook it, and then his consciousness was cut off.

Soon, everything was silent. They had been screaming as they fled, but now everyone was kneeling on the ground with unfocused eyes.

In an eerie silence, Cerdina's shoulders shook with laughter.

"Hm, hahaha, hahaha...." Before all the bowing nobles, she rocked with laughter. She had created the perfect dollhouse. Only when her maniacal laughter at last stopped did Jongin speak.

"Now you have to keep your word, mother."

Cerdina smiled broadly at her son, who stood before her with a crown on his head.

"I haven't forgotten, Jongin." Walking over to him, she bent down to kiss his foot and whispered sweetly, "My beloved King."

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## Chapter 117

### Chapter 117 — Eve

The lingering worry was like a splinter in her fingertips. Invisible, but a constant annoyance that was impossible to entirely forget.

As the day of the wedding approached, the shadow of anxiety in the corner of her heart loomed larger and larger. Jennie kept herself busy with wedding preparations as she tried to ignore it, though since she was unfamiliar with Kurkan customs, most of the preparations were Liam's responsibility.

In the midst of her other work, she also studied the Kurkan language, which strangely had no vowels, only consonants. She was confused at first, but with some effort she could read it clumsily.

Mura would occasionally praise her efforts, explaining that the Kurkan language was difficult for foreigners to learn and that she had never seen anyone learn to read it so quickly. Jennie always pursed her lips in embarrassment at the praise. She was not used to being complimented for the things she did.

The hectic days passed quickly and finally the wedding came. Kurkan weddings began with a ceremony that lasted for five nights together, ending with the wedding vow. On the morning of her wedding, Jennie ate red petals as soon as she woke, then washed in a bathtub filled with them, scrubbing herself meticulously and then drying her long hair.

After her bath, she went to breakfast. In Estia, if there was any event she always went hungry the day before, but in Kurkan it was the opposite. Her ladies were worried because they hadn't been able to get her to eat as much as they thought necessary. Mura encouraged her with every bite.

"You're doing fine! You need to build up a little more strength before the first night, please try harder!"

Jennie ate until she thought her stomach would burst and then finally



stopped, insisting that she couldn't eat any more. As Mura dressed her with the help of the other ladies, she explained several Kurkan customs.

"Beginning today, the guests will enjoy a banquet. They will wallow like pigs in Liam's wine and food. But you will not be seeing them."

When two Kurkans married, both would welcome the guests. But when a Continental married a Kurkan, only the Kurkan partner would welcome the guests. The Continental would only see the guests on the last day, when they took their wedding vows.

"Ahhh..." Mura sighed as she arranged Jennie's hair, and the other ladies echoed her. "I'm really worried. He'll surely behave like a wild beast..."

"What should I do?" Jennie muttered as she drank a special nutritional potion Morga had made for her. "Maybe I should call a doctor..."

Her expression was serious as she sipped the bitter tasting potion, her other hand extended to allow them to trim her nails. Mura took the glass away when it was empty.

"We will establish security measures. If you think it's dangerous, run away."

Mura repeated that multiple times as she continued to dress Jennie. Today her gown would be red, high quality fabric with a separate top and bottom that elegantly framed her bare belly. She wasn't used to exposing so much skin, and ran her hand over the bare space self-consciously.

There was also a fine veil embroidered with gold, and jewelry on her forehead, neck, wrists, and ankles. Along with the jewels on her wrists and ankles, small bells dangled, emitting a faint chime as she walked to keep away bad energies.

The sun had set and it was fully dark outside by the time Jennie was dressed. After a glance at the position of the full moon, Mura and the other ladies departed, leaving Jennie alone. It was silent without

them. Jennie briefly examined herself in the mirror and then went to look out the window.

"....."

In the distance she could hear voices, music, and loud laughter. It seemed as if the wedding banquet was in full swing.

As she looked at the palace, she slowly ran her hand over the window frame, feeling its hard, cold texture.

It made her think of Estia, and she wondered if the King's funeral was already over. The date of her father's funeral and her wedding had overlapped, by pure happenstance.

It felt strange.

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## Chapter 118

### Chapter 118 — Security Measures

Jennie smiled bitterly as she imagined her father's funeral, with all the nobles in Estia gathered. No one there would mourn. She couldn't protest; even his own daughter hadn't shed a single tear. But at least his body would receive a proper burial.

Now Jongin would take the throne. She worried about what the callous and violent man would do to torment the employees at the palace, but she shook her head and put those thoughts aside. She shouldn't think of Estia on her wedding day.

Eating some of the dates Mura had left for her, Jennie let her thoughts fill with other things.

After a while, Mura returned with a small tray bearing a red flower without a stem. Jennie placed the flower in her mouth so that it seemed to be blooming from her lips. Until she met Liam, she would have to carry the flower there.

Following Mura outside, she climbed into a magnificent sedan chair. It looked heavy, but her ladies-in-waiting lifted it with no sign of difficulty and carried her to a small building at the rear of the palace, avoiding the noisy guests. The small annex there was used only for important events. A small wall surrounded the white stone building so only its domed roof could be seen.

"You must go alone from here," said Mura as they left her before the arched doorway. "Liam is waiting inside..."

Jennie nodded and entered the walled courtyard, inwardly impressed. The environment behind the wall was completely different, with small tiles in elaborate patterns on the floor and channels of water flowing in four directions. Small flowers floated on the surface of the clear water, revealing the tiles at the bottom of the channels.

Small lanterns were neatly distributed to illuminate the whole area.

The path Jennie followed was covered by a red silk carpet that stretched all the way to the building. The bells jingled on her ankles as she approached the door.

Taking a deep breath before the dark wooden door, she pushed it open. The interior was dimly lit, with curtains on every window, light shining dimly within. Moonlight cascaded through the circular opening in the ceiling.

Jennie looked at the full moon behind thin clouds, then turned around to look at the room. It was different from any place she had ever seen before. In the center was a circular bed, placed under the window in the ceiling so the moonlight illuminated its white sheets. Beside it was a small table and armchair.

But no matter where she looked, she didn't see Liam.

Beyond the bed, Jennie found a place covered by a thin hanging cloth. Cautiously, she approached.

"Jennie."

A voice spoke from the other side of the cloth.

Quickly she pulled it aside, catching the smell of alcohol. Jennie automatically took a step back.

".....!"

She almost dropped the flower in her mouth, blinking in bewilderment. She remembered what Mura had said.

—*We will establish security measures.*

Jennie had expected her to do something, since she was so worried, but she would never have imagined this.

The large iron pillar before her did not match anything else in the small building. Liam sat in front of it with his arms bound and his upper body wrapped in heavy chains. When he lifted his head, she saw that he was blindfolded with a red cloth.

Suddenly, he smiled. When he spoke, his voice was warm.

"Hello, my bride."

He sounded different than usual. Jennie's hand squeezed over the ache in her breast. To give him an answer, she had to first give him the flower on her lips.

Kneeling before Liam, she bent her head as Mura had told her to, bringing her mouth close to his. His head tilted slightly and he took the flower from her in one bite, swallowing it. Then he pounced.

"Ah..."

Finally she could speak, and the first sound she made was a moan as she received his passionate kiss. But he could do nothing more than that because of the chains. His lips parted, baring his teeth in discontent, and he rested his head on Jennie's neck.

He smelled strongly of alcohol.

"Did you drink a lot?" Jennie asked, taking his face carefully in her hands.

"Ha..." Liam sighed deeply. "Kurkans made me drink alcohol. Like they wanted me to get drunk..." As host, he could not refuse the alcoholic drinks offered by his guests, so he had drunk everything they offered him. He had endured for quite some time before he got drunk.

Jennie examined him carefully. His red robe was the same color as her dress and fit him well. Liam's face moved toward hers, interrupting her admiration.

"Let's do it again."

Seated on his thighs, they kissed deeply. They might have gone on forever if Jennie hadn't been distracted by the constant rattling of his chains.

"Liam, wait a minute..." Jennie caught her breath, inspecting the chains that bound him. "Are you all right? Doesn't it hurt?"

He was not only bound, but blindfolded. Her mouth opened as she looked at all the bindings. Was all this really necessary? She didn't want him to suffer.

But even as she thought that, he laughed softly.

Surely he had allowed them to bind him. Even drunk, they couldn't have tied Liam up like this if he had not permitted it.

Liam shook his head as if he were trying to clear it and licked his lips.

"Are you wearing the red dress?"

"Yes. It's the same color as your robe."

"I see. I can hear the bells."

"The bells...are in the jewelry."

"Where? On the wrists?"

"On the wrists and the ankles."

"It must look beautiful."

Jennie touched the red cloth covering Liam's eyes.

"If I remove this..."

"You'd better not," Liam said flatly. His voice softened. "I miss you too, Jennie. But I want our first wedding night to be safe."

The words made her blush. Hesitating, Jennie wrapped her arms around his shoulders, and Liam let out a sigh.

The clouds moved away. The moonlight brightened.

She remembered the other night she had spent with him when the moon was full. Her memories of that night were so filled with passion, it embarrassed her to think of it.

And Liam seemed even more aroused than he had been that night.

His manhood was firmly erect, bulging through the fabric of his robe.

They had warned her that he hadn't smoked any tobacco for a week. It was to temporarily alleviate its effects, so he would stay more true to his instincts.

Between the full moon and the alcohol, his tolerance was drastically decreased.

For Liam's sake, she had to do something.

She had already made up her mind and grabbed for the hem of her bodice when he spoke.

"Can you take off your clothes?" he asked, as if he already knew what she was going to do, even blindfolded. "Even just the upper part. I'll lick your breasts."

Loosening the ribbons and small buttons her ladies-in-waiting had so deftly fastened, her bodice fell away. The jewels clicked as they struck the floor. She felt nervous with the air brushing her bare skin, and her nipples stiffened in the slight chill.

Seated on his thighs, she cupped her breasts in her hands to make it easier for the bound Liam, though it was embarrassing to touch her own soft flesh this way. Liam's head bent as he slowly licked her neck.

He rubbed his face against her breast and her nipples hardened in anticipation. She could feel herself growing wet, even though he hadn't touched her there.

Noisily, he began to lick and suck on her nipples, his sharp teeth biting to the point of pain. In the dark and silent room, there was no other sound to be heard but the noise of his lips and tongue.

"Now, the lower garment," he whispered.

As he licked her breasts, Jennie untied the skirt of her dress with trembling hands and slowly stood up.

The skirt slipped down to cover Liam's thighs, and her underclothes

fell on top of it. As she reached for her long veil, Liam quickly buried his face between her legs. Jennie squirmed backward, surprised.

"Oh no, not yet...I have to remove the veil..."

"Keep it on. I think it's best to leave at least at least one article of clothing." Unable to follow her, he whispered hoarsely, "come here, Jennie."

Slowly, she moved her hips forward.

"Hmm...come a little closer," Liam said as he licked her thighs. "Now spread your legs..."

Jennie didn't know what to do with her hands. But as his head moved to the cleft between her legs and he gently began to lick her swelling clitoris, she grabbed his hair, and his tongue thrust forcefully into her. An uncontrollable moan burst from her mouth.

"Ahhh...!" Her thighs trembled as the strength left them, but she tried to stay upright. Liam never paused, licking every inch of her opening, sucking at the fluids that began to trickle from her.

Lewd sounds filled her ears. Her thighs clenched and unclenched repeatedly as she moaned.

"Ah, Liam, hmm..."

Relentlessly, he tormented her clitoris, making her eyes roll back white as the sensations intensified.

Jennie gripped his hair.

"Hmm, ahh, ah...!" Her back arched, a trembling running through her as he thrust his tongue inside her.

"We're just getting started," he murmured, but Jennie couldn't take it anymore. Her legs collapsed beneath her and her wet lower lips touched Liam's thigh.

Jennie bit her lip as she looked up at him. It wasn't enough. She wanted more, something harder. Her own thoughts shocked her. She



shuddered, making him smile, his lips wet with her fluids.

"I taught you to do it alone, this is no different. You can do it, right?"

At that question, she untied the lower part of his robe, exposing his underclothes. It looked as if his erect manhood would tear through the cloth. When she removed it, his manhood hardened further, veins straining. Normally she would have hesitated in fear of his ferocity, but this time she did not.

Maybe it was because she knew the pleasure he would give her.

Placing her hands on his shoulders, she slowly sank down. As his manhood touched her, Liam shuddered, exhaling slowly.

"Haa..."

Just inserting the tip of his cock was a little painful.

But though she moved slowly, he was patient.

"Oh, well done..." He murmured as he sucked on her breasts. His manhood was too hot, too big. She could feel the texture of him, the curving shape of his penis, the thick, pulsing veins. Jennie closed her eyes tight and lowered herself fully onto him.

".....!"

Her body stiffened as his manhood reached deep inside her and swelled, growing larger.

"Jennie..." Liam spoke her name with difficulty, biting her neck. She moaned. Impaled on his manhood, she gripped his shoulders. This man had allowed them to chain him up for her. Today she would have to do the work.

As she lifted her hips, she felt a tingling sensation that went all the way to her toes. She sank down all at once, her thighs slapping against him and making her eyes filled with tears. She did it again, trying to move faster. With every movement, the long veil swished and her bells chimed.

"Hmm, ahh..."

The feel of her clitoris rubbing against his lower abdomen made her tremble, but Jennie kept moving, an arduous pace that made her pant open-mouthed with pleasure. Liam's teeth bit into her neck and he rubbed his face in her as if he couldn't stand it.

The cloth covering his eyes slid down, and Jennie saw why he had hidden his eyes.

His golden eyes were like a beast's. Intent and overwhelming, radiating ferocity. He looked at Jennie with those eyes narrowed as if he were watching a prey creature that he would soon devour.

All of her instincts urged her to flee, but the moment she tried to retreat, Liam lifted his hips sharply.

".....!"

Her eyes widened as she fell onto him, and he began to thrust into her as if he had been waiting for exactly that. His thrusts were so fast and powerful compared to Jennie's efforts.

"Liam, hmm, ah..." Her body rocked as if she were riding a galloping horse and she called out to him desperately. "Ah, Liam, wait...!"

But Liam wasn't listening.

"Why did you try to run away, Jennie?" His eyes narrowed as he smiled. "You have to get pregnant."

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## Chapter 119

### Chapter 119 — Continuation

"Well, that..." She felt her face burn with embarrassment. She had said she wanted to get pregnant, but Liam seemed to mean it in a different way. But since she couldn't contradict him, he thrust his hips upward fiercely, his thick manhood bumping into her cervix. Every time he thrust deep inside, her clitoris rubbed between their bodies and intense pleasure raced through her body.

The sensation was beyond simple stimulation. It was a terrifying pleasure. Jennie moaned, shuddering.

"You said you wanted to have a baby, right?"

"Hmm, hck, ahh...!"

"Your husband is working so hard..." he murmured as she trembled. "Shouldn't you...participate too?"

With those words, he pushed deep inside her, his manhood straining against all her inner walls and making her moan. Liam's brow furrowed as he growled roughly.

"Argh..."

Hot liquid jetted inside her. She could feel it clearly.

Cramps ran jaggedly through her body and her fingers and toes stretched and curled, tears sliding down her cheeks. And Liam continued slowly thrusting into her as if he were enjoying all of it.

Somehow, Jennie managed to raise her head. His golden eyes peered into her tear-streaked face. Even though he had cum, his eyes were still glowing, and his body was boiling hot, power and vigor straining in his body.

"You're tired, Jennie..." The words slurred together oddly. He sounded drunk. "Lemme do it for you..."

The words snapped her back to her senses. If she removed the chains, she might die on their first night. But as he began to pull as if he would snap them apart, she hurriedly spoke.

"I'll do it...!"

"No."

"Liam...I c-can do it right..." She stammered, almost pleading as she touched his chest and the cold chain across it.

"....."

His eyes narrowed. She could feel his manhood hardening little by little inside her. She was already filled with his semen, coating every part of her inside with no space untouched. Closing her eyes, she lifted her hips, feeling their fluids flowing out of her flower, slickly coating her pussy and inner thighs.

Carefully, she moved up and down again.

"Ah..." The moan escaped her unconsciously. The bells jingled as she moved. Although all of this was embarrassing, she paid it no attention. Her face reddened as she continued moving her body, and Liam watched silently.

"...Touch your nipples," he said. A request, not an order.

In imitation of his hands, she rubbed one nipple between her fingers. He bit the other. Jennie flinched, but kept moving.

"Faster," he said between licks, his tongue pressing and flicking intensely. Jennie moved faster. She felt as dizzy as if she were drunk, as if she were hypnotized by his golden eyes. She kept moving in an instinctive rhythm.

"More..." She moaned, straining her body to satisfy him.

Her breath came hotter and her lips trembled as the parted, saliva wetting them. Overwhelmed by the pleasure, she met his eyes as he stared at her silently. It was embarrassing. Was she the only one so intoxicated with pleasure?

"Ah, does this feel good?" She panted. "Ahhh, hmm..."

But he didn't answer immediately. His lips were pressed tight together as he stared at her, tear-streaked and messy, her heart pounding.

"You're doing fine," he said finally. "That's the problem."

".....!"

Jennie's eyes grew large as his manhood swelled further inside her.

"Hck, ahhh, I don't like this...!" She said, frightened.

"You don't like it?" He bit her neck, her shoulder, and then her breast in quick succession, his eyes hot with excitement. "Don't you like it, Jennie?"

She felt a sharp pain between her legs. She almost thought she might tear if his manhood grew any larger, but she shook her head, crying as she pressed a hand to her slightly swollen belly.

"Ahh, no..." she gasped. "Hmm, okay..."

Finally, she caught her breath and reached out to cup his cheek in her hand.

"I want to have your baby..." Her thumb rubbed gently below his eye. She could feel the burning heat of his tanned skin against her white fingers as she spoke the name she had been wanting to say for a long time. "Li..."

His face went rigid. His manhood, pressing firmly against her cervix, swelled uncontrollably. It would not soften until he had filled her again with his semen.

It was hard to breathe. Jennie's body trembled as she sobbed, and as she was struggling not to lose her senses, she heard the creaking of metal bending.

The iron pillar bent as if it were made of rubber, and the chains snapped.

Jennie fell backward immediately, sprawled on the veil and looking up at Liam in shock. Liam tore off his robe, exposing his naked body, and immediately thrust inside her.

"You're going to kill me, huh?" He panted, as Jennie struggled against the large hands gripping her wrists. "I've been containing myself until now..."

He couldn't control his strength. Tears welled in her eyes at the power of his grip, but Jennie couldn't clearly feel the pain. She felt like her inner walls would tear as he pounded into her like a beast, but it wasn't all pain. The line between pain and pleasure was blurring, and gradually, the pain was a goad to her pleasure.

Panting frantically, she wrapped her legs around his waist, her slender calves gliding over his muscular hips. Her toes curled, clawing at him as she moaned.

The tip of his manhood, swollen to its limit, spurted semen into her and he bit her nipple as she shuddered.

"Ah, hmm...Jennie..." Liam flexed, pouring his semen into her womb, moving his manhood to stir it inside her, and Jennie climaxed again.

She was already at her limit. Her own fluids were held inside her by his manhood and she could feel him rubbing his semen into her.

"Li, Li..." She screamed his name, frantic, and every time she said it he became more ferocious. She was trying to pull herself together, but she was only unraveling further as reality faded. Lethargy spread through her body. She felt like she was floating through clouds.

"Ah..." A soft moan escaped her as her body stretched, trembling.

Liam kissed her. She could feel the touch of his lips as vividly as she could feel his hot seed in her uterus, and she shuddered with pleasure as she kissed him.

Gazing at each other, their tongues entwined. They were connected as one.

She felt like her body was going to explode from pleasure so extreme,

she couldn't express it. Her mind was a mess. It felt as if the world she had known had shattered to pieces, and a new one born as she realized it: the man before her was her husband. Unable to contain herself, she whispered it to him...

"My husband..."

His smile was so bright at those possessive words.

His lips moved in slow, ecstatic response.

"I love you, Jennie."

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## Chapter 120

### Chapter 120 — Five Nights

She couldn't remember much after that. She couldn't think of anything but what she was doing with him.

They were truly one, sharing the same sensations.

Greedily, they devoured each other, giving each other pleasure. Every part of her body belonged to Liam, and the same was true of his body. From his healthy bronzed skin to the dazzling golden eyes she loved so much, all of him was hers.

They completely owned each other. Even if the world fell to pieces, that truth would never change, never die.

Exhausted from hours of sex, Jennie lost consciousness for some time. When she woke up, she was on the bed, and Liam was still thrusting into her.

"Ahhh, hmm...!" As soon as she opened her eyes, she felt a surge of pleasure. Even after she had fainted, Liam had continued thrusting into her wetness, and she was so sensitive she climaxed easily. "Hmm...!"

Liam let out a bestial grunt as he sped up, thrusting into her faster.

"Ahhh, stop, I can't take it anymore..." She struggled, pleading, but he didn't stop. His teeth bit her trembling neck, leaving yet another mark on her body. His pupils were dilated, his golden eyes filled with wild passion. There wasn't the slightest trace of reason in his eyes, but oddly she felt no fear. Her husband would never hurt her.

Looking into his eyes, she wrapped her arms around his neck and kissed him even as he wrung another climax from her. She didn't even know how many times she had done that.

"Hmm, ahhh...!"

Grimacing, she endured the pleasure, and Liam moaned as he hugged



her trembling body, cummed inside her again.

She fainted again and woke up to more of the same, with no idea how long she had been unconscious.

There was a strange sensation in her belly, tight with Liam's manhood, still swollen, still thrusting, still intermittently filling her with his seed.

"....."

Liam's arms tightened around her. Though Jennie had fainted twice, it seemed he hadn't slept at all.

His eyes had cleared and he seemed to have come to his senses at last. He had stopped thrusting, and was lying quietly within her.

In silence, he kissed her forehead, and Jennie buried her face in his chest. She felt strangely, painfully full, and Liam gently patted her back as she moaned. In the peaceful quiet, they understood each other without having to speak a word. As Liam's hand caressed her, Jennie couldn't help thinking.

She wanted his child. She wanted to raise a child that looked like him or herself. She had never had a proper family. Her mother had died early, her father was a fool, and her stepmother and stepbrother were obnoxious and cruel. It had left her skeptical about family.

But she thought it would be different if she had a family with Liam. He would be such a good father, attentive and loving, no comparison at all to her own father. And even if she had no children, their love would not change. They would still be happy.

But she still felt the desire to fill the empty space in her heart.

Held against his warm chest, Jennie sighed and closed her eyes.

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The time flew wildly by. Though someone placed food outside the doors at mealtime, they were so engrossed in each other that it was always cold when they ate it. Jennie didn't even realize she was

hungry. Though they had done this together so many times before, this ceremony made everything new.

Now she understood perfectly what he meant when he had promised that she would be the center of his world. She couldn't imagine a world without him. As soon as they woke up, they were intertwined again.

"Hmm...!"

"Ahh..."

Climaxing, Liam ejected more of his hot seed into her body, and Jennie came with him, her whole body shuddering. He kissed her all over her body before he went to retrieve another platter of food.

When he returned, he had the tray in one hand and a note in the other.

"....."

His eyes sank as he read the note quickly, and then glanced up, noting her curiosity.

"It's no big deal," he told her.

Liam tossed the note away indifferently and gave Jennie five grapes. As she ate, he cut the food into bite-sized pieces to make it easier for her to eat, but she fiddled with her grapes.

No matter what happened, he would try to protect her, no matter what it took it, by any means necessary. It worried her. Liam might choose methods that were less than appropriate...

Popping one of the grapes into her mouth, she chewed and swallowed. First she had to concentrate on recovering, as soon as possible.

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Five nights passed in a blink. Fortunately, on the fifth night, she

rested better. She and Liam only caressed and sucked each other, and he did not penetrate her.

The next morning her ladies arrived early before the sun rose. When she opened her eyes, Jennie looked around, but there was no sign of Liam.

"Jennie! You're safe..." Mura looked deeply relieved.

Pushing the remains of the iron pillar and broken chains casually aside, she looked at Jennie. "It seems Liam really cares about his bride."

Just as she had on the first night of the wedding, Jennie ate more of the red petals, then washed in a bathtub filled with them. Mura and her other ladies massaged her limbs, which had been sore for days, and then quickly dressed her.

Today she was wearing a long white dress that covered her entire body. A long veil embroidered in gold thread trailed from her back, and around her waist she wore a jeweled belt. Her silver hair was decorated with white flowers and small diamonds.

Dressed completely in white, Jennie lifted a white flower to her lips. It trembled a little. It was unusual for her to be nervous, going in public, so it took her a moment to understand why.

She would soon be publicly recognized as his wife.

From this day forward, Jennie would be the Queen of Kurkan.

"Around here..." Mura's face was full of anticipation.

They had carried Jennie in a sedan chair to the garden, filled with hundreds of white flowers that made everything smell pleasantly sweet. Many guests were seated on either side of a long wine-colored velvet carpet, and they fell silent as the bride appeared.

All eyes focused on her, watching as she walked onto the carpet, holding the skirt of her dress in her hands. It was a pleasant day, with a cool breeze blowing lightly under a warm sun. The hem of her long gown trailed behind her.

There were many people gathered at the far end of the carpet, but her gaze focused on only one. Liam was wearing a long robe embroidered in golden thread and gazing back at her as if he were hypnotized.

As she came to stand before him, he blinked and shook himself, leaning down to bite the flower from her lips gently. Swallowing it, he straightened and turned to face forward.

Before her, Morga held out a box and opened the lid to reveal two daggers, each trailing silk ribbons.

Liam drew out the small silver dagger covered in amethysts and tied it to her waist, then extended a gold dagger so she could do the same to him.

Handing the box to a nearby attendant, Morga took two glasses and handed them to Jennie and Liam.

Each glass held a clear liquid, a potion to strengthen their vows. With the points of their daggers, the bride and groom pricked their ring fingers and let a drop of blood fall into each glass. As the blood blended with the clear liquid, it turned light red.

Exchanging their glasses, Jennie and Liam slowly drank, gazing into each other's eyes as the warmth of the potion spread through their bodies. When he had drained his glass, Liam spoke.

"I am your world. And you are the center of my world."

The words emerged stiffly, almost as if he was nervous, which was very unusual. Jennie had to take a deep breath herself to calm her nerves.

"Let us be a sole existence to each other," she said.

They spoke the final vows together.

"Then I will swear to call you my husband, my wife."

Those watching applauded thunderously, and the Kurkans seated in the front row rose to throw colorful flower petals. In the shower of

petals, Jennie's smile glowed, and Liam wrapped his arms around her, beaming.

"Liam!" She whispered to him. She wanted to tell him something she hadn't been able to say until that moment.

*I love you, Ishakan.*

She had repeated it in her mind over and over to make sure she wouldn't stumble over it. But when she parted her lips to speak, firmly, so her voice wouldn't tremble, nothing happened.

".....!"

Suddenly, under her feet, black smoke billowed.

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## Chapter 121

### Chapter 121 — Bitter Separation

The moment she saw the black smoke whirling around her ankles, Jennie's thoughts froze. The faint, hallucinatory sound of chains that had haunted her for so long was suddenly loud and clear, jangling in her ears.

Cerdina was trying to bring her back to Estia.

She realized it instinctively and suddenly it felt as if everything was collapsing around her and she was falling into darkness, cold and deep. She couldn't breathe. Her vision went black and she was clutched by such terror, she was falling...

"...Jennie!"

Jennie's whole body trembled. Her lips moved, but she couldn't scream. Her voice was gone.

"Jennie!!!"

The sound of the voice calling her snapped her back.

She was floating, enveloped in black smoke, as Morga and the other sorcerers surrounded her, shouting in Kurkan. The red velvet carpet had been moved and in its place was a magical pattern that must have been drawn beforehand.

The sea of white flowers had fallen and been trampled in the chaos, and Liam walked across the broken blooms, reaching out to her.

His hand went through her as if she were an illusion.

Others tried. No one could touch her.

Terrified, Jennie stretched out to grab for Liam's hand, clinging to him, but somehow he couldn't grasp her. Somehow only Jennie could hold onto him as the smoke coiled tighter around her.

Somehow she knew that if she let go, she would be dragged to Estia. Her arms strained as if they might be torn off, but she clung to him with all her might.

"Liam! The blood...!" Morga shouted.

Unsheathing his dagger, Liam sliced his own arm.

His blood gushed red and fell, absorbing into the glowing magic pattern on the ground.

The smoke around Jennie receded.

One of the magicians standing at the corner of the pattern collapsed, vomiting blood.

"It's not enough!" Morga screamed. His face was white. "It needs more, much more than I told you!"

He stopped, gagging as if he were nauseous, and covered his mouth with his hand. Blood spurted between his fingers and the Kurkan sorcerer wiped it away with the back of his hand.

"We are fine. Don't worry. Give us more."

Liam immediately slashed himself again. Every time his dagger flashed, blood gushed forth, instantly absorbed into the magic pattern. The sorcerers were obviously suffering, but they were standing firm.

Jennie's eyes filled as she watched. She watched as her husband bled. She watched as he sliced his body again and again and the pattern soaked it up.

But the black smoke wasn't weakening. On the contrary, it was gradually thickening.

Three more gashes in Liam's golden skin. Her heart seized with every new wound on his body. He had bled so much, too much, enough to be dangerous.

But even if he poured out more, nothing would change. Even if he

spilled all of it. The black smoke crept over her.

They both knew this could not be stopped this way.

But Liam wouldn't give up even if it cost him his life.

She had been happy. Her happiness in Kurkan had been like a dream. And now the time had come to wake up.

Strangely, she felt calm, as if she had known unconsciously that this would happen. The shackles on her ankles had grown thin and faded, almost invisible, but they had never really broken. She had known someday she would have to go back to that dark place, where no light would ever reach her.

There was no need to make others suffer.

Looking at Liam, she couldn't say the words she had wanted to tell him. She had to say something else instead.

"I'm sorry, Liam."

His golden eyes shook. He knew what she was thinking.

"Don't look for me," she whispered.

His eyes widened.

"Jennie, don't," he said thickly, as if through a blockage in his throat. His face was desperate as she let go of his hand.

The last warmth in her hand faded. Black smoke whirled around her, engulfing her even as Liam reached for her and tried to embrace her, calling desperately.

"Jennie!!!"

Even a stab to her heart wouldn't hurt so much as seeing her husband like that. But she didn't look away. She watched him until the black smoke consumed her.

When the smoke dissipated, she was not in the desert. The marble



floor was cold underneath her and she shivered. Cold, so cold.

"Long time no see, Jennie," said a voice.

Sitting up, she slowly lifted her head. It was a familiar place. It was the hall of the royal palace of Estia, the same hall where she had welcomed Liam as the King of Kurkan. Marble columns lined the immense hall, and above them fluttered pennants bearing the royal emblem of Estia.

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## Chapter 122

### Chapter 122 — Darkness

As she looked around, Jennie turned toward the front of the hall and the throne. Jongin was seated there, wearing a crown, and Cerdina stood beside him with a slight smile.

Slowly, Jennie closed her eyes and opened them again. She knew the future that awaited her. Locked in a dollhouse, living a life worse than death. They would play with her like a toy until she bored them, and then they would throw her away.

But Jennie had tasted freedom, and found it sweet.

Carefully, she grasped the dagger at her waist. She was a very useful hostage, now that she had become the bride of the King of Kurkan. But she would never let them use her that way. In her last moments, she would make her own decisions. Her hand tightened on the dagger as she whispered the words in her mind.

*I'm sorry, Liam. I'm sorry, I love you.*

Pulling the dagger from its sheath, she aimed it for her heart without hesitation. But an instant before it found its mark, Jongin rose from the throne and shoved her back.

"Ahhh!" Jennie groaned in pain, dropping the dagger. Jongin kicked it away, sending it flying into a corner. His fiery blue eyes glared.

Jennie immediately sank her teeth into her tongue.

She could hear the sound of her own flesh tearing as she bit with all her might, tasting blood. But she did not die. Before she could try again, Jongin was thrusting his fingers into her mouth.

"You really are a fucking bitch...!" He screamed as she tried to spit his fingers out.

Cerdina only smiled at his fury. Slowly, she approached, lowering her eyes to Jennie.

"Did you have fun in the desert? The spell has faded quite a bit." She pulled out a small glass bottle. "But you have to stay home now, Jennie."

Jongin snatched the bottle from Cerdina's hand, bending over Jennie. She fought like a madwoman.

She bit the fingers in her mouth, shoving as his knees pinned her thighs down, jerking convulsively away from him. Cerdina frowned at the inelegant display.

"Don't move. You can't resist."

Jennie's body instantly froze. She could do nothing but blink. Though she tried desperately to make her limbs obey, she lay as motionless as a broken doll.

Chuckling, Jongin removed the lid from the bottle.

Jennie looked up at him, her eyes filling with tears.

Her lips trembled as she pleaded in her mind.

*Please. Please don't do this. Just kill me. Just kill me...*

"....."

Jongin's eyes twitched for an instant, but only for an instant. He poured the black liquid into her mouth, and the blood and potion mingled together as they flowed down her throat.

She remembered the golden desert. The precious memories she had made flowed like sand through her fingers.

*When he had held her as she cried.*

*Stay with me in the desert.*

*When he had accepted the peony from her.*

*We should have a wedding. Invite everyone in the desert and make it really festive...*

*When she had first called him husband.*

*I love you, Jennie...*

Those memories of their time together were lost to an abyss. Like sand, they flowed away, buried somewhere deep and dark, locked behind an iron door. It could not be moved. It was wrapped in chains and locked with a lock that had no key.

She could not remember the name of her beloved.

Where those memories had been, new ones were created. They rose randomly at first, but soon clicked seamlessly together, occupying Jennie's mind. She had been sobbing, but suddenly Jennie blinked, bewildered.

*Why was I crying?*

Lifting a hand to her cheek, she found it damp. Her head tilted in confusion, and blue eyes suddenly appeared before her. Jongin's face lowered to hers.

"Smile," he ordered.

Tears dripped from her chin. She still didn't understand why she had been crying, but she smiled obediently. Jongin's eyes sparkled.

"Jennie, do you love me?" He asked.

There was a stabbing pain deep in her heart and Jennie grimaced. Suddenly she was so dizzy, her stomach lurched. Sick. Her heart thumped faster and she felt so nauseous, but she still knew the correct answer, and spoke it naturally.

"...Yes."

Jongin smiled affectionately.

"I love you," he whispered.

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## Chapter 123

### Chapter 123 — Deceit

In Estia, preparations were underway for the King's wedding. Only a few months had passed since the funeral of the previous King, but Jongin was determined to hold the wedding anyway.

He would marry his half-sister, the Princess Jennie, and though it was an incestuous marriage, the nobles of Estia accepted it without objection.

In other countries, such a marriage was considered repulsive. But they could not say so openly. It was another country's internal matter, so they only whispered about it behind the scenes.

The new King Jongin decreed there would be a magnificent wedding. He was impatient, but he wanted a public wedding. Invitations were sent throughout the continent, inviting dignitaries from other countries and even the Kurkans from the western desert. That was strange, considering they were usually ignored and despised as barbarians.

"We must have a banquet to welcome the dignitaries attending the wedding. A big budget will be necessary."

Jennie's voice carried through the Cabinet Council and then fell silent as she stared at the assembled nobles. Normally, someone would have objected, arguing that the wedding need not be so extravagant.

But no one disagreed now. All of them spoke and agreed unanimously. The Cabinet Council proceeded like a stage play.

It seemed Jennie was the only one that felt any incongruity.

Had the nobles always been so loyal to the royal family? She thought in the past it had been different. It seemed so strange to her. As she wondered, she deliberately brought up the issue the nobles hated.

Tax reform.

She had thought about it for a long time, but had never dared to attempt it. But this time, her fear was groundless. The nobles accepted it meekly. And having gotten what she wanted, Jennie felt as if everyone around her was somehow deceiving her.

After another meaningless council concluded, a few nobles lingered. Jennie approached Count Valtein and Finance Minister Laurent.

"Thank you for your hard work today. The meeting ended smoothly."

"No, it's thanks to you," Minister Laurent replied, smiling. Count Valtein nodded his agreement.

Jennie shut her mouth at their obedient attitudes. In the past, when they had spoken of affairs of state, these men had not held back. The two of them had always had a lot to say, from which nobles might be persuadable to what issues should take precedence.

Now every noble deferred to the royal family in all things, and the Count and the Finance Minister were no exceptions. They had no opinions. Like all the other nobles, they only nodded.

She wanted them to argue about some issues, but there was no point now. They would agree with whatever she said. Jennie politely made her farewell and left the conference room, trailed by her ladies-in-waiting.

"His Highness has returned," said an attendant, approaching her hurriedly.

Jongin occasionally went hunting, and he was always very angry if Jennie did not greet him when he returned to the palace. Jennie immediately followed the attendant. Jongin always took out his anger on the palace staff.

When she arrived at the entry hall, Jongin was entering, accompanied by knights and squires. There was also a woman by his side with wavy blonde hair, looking beautiful in her hunting clothes and smiling prettily.

It was Lady Mirael, who was Jongin's current favorite consort. As soon as she saw Jennie, a cloud passed over her face, but then she

smiled faintly.

Entwining her arm in Jongin's, she whispered something to him. Jongin did not react to her words, but he also did not push her away.

Jennie lowered her head. She knew she was to blame for this. Her body was defective, and she could not fulfill the duties of a wife. Though Jongin had been generous to her so far, she knew she would be in danger after she officially became the Queen of Estia if she was a defective woman.

She did not want to be expelled. All she wanted was to fulfill her duties as a member of the royal family of Estia.

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## Chapter 124

### Chapter 124 — Uncomfortable

She had to try harder and become the perfect queen, Jennie thought, her fingertips playing nervously against each other. Suddenly a shadow loomed before her.

"Aren't you going to greet me?"

Blue eyes were staring down at her as Jennie snapped back to her senses. Lady Mirael stood behind him, gazing at her sternly as Jennie obediently greeted him.

"Anyway." Jongin jerked his chin toward the nearby wagon. "There are skins that can be used from among the animals we hunted today. They will be sent to your palace, pick what you like."

"Thank you."

Jongin stared at her.

"Smile," he ordered.

Hastily, Jennie smiled. It was a forced smile, but Jongin didn't care about that. He stroked her cheek with the back of his hand.

"Let's have dinner together," he said. "Come to the main palace later."

"...Yes."

With that brief conversation, he went into the main palace with Lady Mirael. Jennie waited until he was completely out of sight and then hurried back to her own palace, where paperwork awaited her in her office. There were many things she had to attend to today.

Though she would become the Queen after the wedding, Jennie was still a Princess now. And she had to take care of most of the royal family's duties because of Jongin's disinterest in fulfilling his own responsibilities. His temperament had only become worse since he had ascended the throne. He mistreated and expelled people from the



palace for even minor offenses. Since he had difficulty judging things rationally, Jennie had taken over all affairs of state.

Of course, she was willing to do all this for the man she loved. But on the days when she collapsed into her bed, exhausted from the endless work, she did wish that someone would help her with the responsibilities. She couldn't do this forever.

Hopefully Jongin would take some of the burden soon.

Signing the first of many documents, she looked up at Countess Melissa.

"I'm still a little nervous about making decisions on my own," Jennie said as the Countess removed the signed document and replaced it with another. "It would be nice if His Highness would look at the minutes of today's meeting..."

She paused. The moment she mentioned Jongin, the Countess's smile had vanished, and a hint of coldness appeared on her otherwise expressionless face.

"Of course, the right thing would be for me to try harder," Jennie said hastily.

Countess Melissa smiled as if nothing had happened.

"Let's rest for a while," Jennie said, putting down her quill and smiling back. "Can you bring me some tea?"

"Yes, Princess."

As the lady left the office, Jennie sighed. Lately, the Countess had been making her feel a little uncomfortable. It made her feel guilty to be so uncomfortable, as the Countess had been with her since she was a child.

Shaking her head, Jennie rose from her seat to go look out the window. Her fingers were numbed from gripping her quill as she slid them over the frame.

Outside, the garden looked desolate.

Flowers did not grow properly in the palace anymore. All the small animals had disappeared, with no cats, birds, or squirrels to be seen.

She had asked the gardener to take special care of the osmanthus shoots, but they had eventually died.

There had been attempts to plant other flowers, but all of them withered and died. Only thorny-leaved junipers grew.

Until now, the palace had always been filled with flowers, and Jennie greatly missed them. A cool breeze blew through the barren tree branches, making them sway, and Jennie lowered her gaze.

"....."

Suddenly, there was an emptiness in her chest. It was a familiar pain, but it had been tormenting her lately. When she called a doctor to examine her, he had said there was no apparent cause.

She thought it was fatigue and ignored it, but every time her heart ached, she suffered. An unbearable feeling of emptiness filled her, as if she had lost something so important...

But Jennie didn't know what it was.

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## Chapter 125

### Chapter 125 — Appearance

Jennie had been *in love* with Jongin for a long time.

He had stood by her and cared for her after she lost her mother. She still vividly remembered the moment when she had confessed her feelings for him, in a beautiful garden full of peonies. With a peony trembling in her hand, she had told him she loved him, and Jongin had said they would have a great wedding.

Every time Jongin upset her, she remembered that day. The warmth of the sunshine, the cool breeze, and the happiness she had felt...in spite of his cold words and actions, she knew he loved her.

But sometimes he would push her to the limit, as if he was trying to test her. Today was no different.

"Aren't you jealous?"

At his question, Jennie's hands froze on her cutlery.

She had come to dine at the main palace at his request, and she slowly swallowed the food in her mouth.

"Don't you feel anything even if I'm with another girl in front of you?" He asked again.

Jennie's lips quivered. She wasn't sure how she should answer that question.

"...All right," she said hesitantly, trying to guess what he wanted. Of course her pride was hurt, but there was nothing she could do about it. She was defective.

She could not fulfill her role as his wife. She had no choice but to tolerate it.

But Jongin didn't seem to like that answer. His gaze turned fierce and his knife clicked loudly against his dish.

"You don't care what I do?" He asked dangerously.

"....."

Though she was trying to give him the answer she wanted, no matter how hard she thought, Jennie couldn't guess what that might be. Jongin frowned at her as she blinked, puzzled. He took a deep breath.

"What happened to the skins?" He asked.

The precious animal hides he had acquired on his hunt had all been sent to her palace. He was such a good hunter, he had managed to kill all of them without damaging the skins too much.

Unfortunately, she hadn't had time to look at them.

"I'll look after dinner," she said quickly. She had been too busy with the backlog of paperwork, but she would have to take care of it soon. "I had a lot of work today..."

Fortunately, he didn't say anything. He knew how overworked she was.

"Just tell me if you like anything. I'll bring more next time."

Pulling a small box from his pocket, he handed it to her. Inside was an ornate diamond-encrusted ring with an amethyst in the center. Her eyes went to his hand, where there was a ring on his ring finger in the same shape, made of diamonds and a sapphire.

It was probably an engagement ring.

"Put it on."

Taking the ring out of its box, she slid it onto her finger. It felt heavy and burdensome, likely because of the size of the gemstones, and she couldn't believe he had given her such an expensive ring when the palace budget had already been drastically reduced because of the wedding. She couldn't be happy when she knew where the money for it had come from.

"You really don't like this stuff. But wear it anyway," Jongin said.

Even though she didn't look happy with the gift, he was satisfied just to see her wear it. "Do you want any other gifts?"

The thought came suddenly to her mind, and Jennie spoke it unconsciously. "A quill."

"...A quill?" Jongin asked incredulously.

"The other day you gave me some quills," Jennie said, smiling slightly. "You sharpened the tips yourself."

It was a precious memory. She thought it would make him happy, but his face twisted with fury, as if he were about to scream and rage.

"Well, I have a lot of paperwork to do, so..." she said quickly, trying to distract him. She bit her lower lip. "I'm sorry. I guess I said something meaningless."

At her dejected expression, he rose from his seat and swept plates and cutlery from the table with a wave of his arms, sending them crashing to the floor.

"Come to the room today," he ordered, looking at Jennie.

"....."

Her eyes darkened as Jongin turned and left. The servant that had placed the last course of the meal on the table stepped back silently, and Jennie stared at the dish in front of her, which she had barely touched.

Time passed. Jennie sat and shivered, distracted. Once the sun had gone completely down, one of Jongin's attendants came to fetch her from her palace.

It had been a sunny day, but over the course of the afternoon it had clouded over, and now it was pouring outside. Walking under the umbrella held by the attendant, Jennie's feet felt like lead. She didn't want to go. She knew she should tolerate it for the man she loved, but she just couldn't.

As soon as she reached Jongin's chambers, she could hear the

moaning. The attendant opened the door, and Jennie entered under Jongin's sharp eyes.

***WARNING! SEXUAL ABUSE, ATTEMPTED SEXUAL ASSAULT.***

"Ahhh, Your Highness, ahh, more, do it harder...!"

"Hmm, ahh...."

Lady Mirael's naked body glowed in the light of the bedchamber as she embraced Jongin's neck seductively. Jongin paused in his thrusting and drew a deep breath, motioning to Jennie to sit down. He was drenched with sweat.

"Don't look away," he ordered as Jennie went to sit in the chair beside the bed.

Her hands clenched as she fixed her gaze at the man and woman entwined together. Lady Mirael moaned louder as Jongin thrust again, but he was watching Jennie as she sat trembling in her seat. The sight electrified him. Roughly, he pulled his manhood out and let it rest on Lady Mirael's belly.

Quickly, Jennie looked away, releasing the breath she had been holding.

"....."

The room reeked of an unpleasant stink. Though she wanted to leave this room as soon as she could, Jongin never let her go easily. Pushing Lady Mirael away, he climbed out of bed, his manhood swaying before Jennie, wet and dripping with many kinds of fluids. He ran his hand through his damp hair.

"Suck it," he ordered.

It was disgusting. It was repulsive. Jennie tried to open her mouth obediently, but quickly had to cover it with her hand as she gagged and retched. Jongin stared at her with cold blue eyes.

"You can't even do that?" He asked with a twisted smile. They were engaged and soon would be married, but Jennie and Jongin had

never had sex.

Every time he touched her, she started shivering and felt nauseous.

He had ignored her protests once. He had tried to do it by force while she cried and begged, but after she had fainted, he gave up. Now, she just had to watch him have sex with his consorts.

Normally, he let her go after she patiently watched, but today was different. Just as she managed to stop gagging and opened her mouth to apologize, he slapped her face, a sudden shock of intense pain.

Bewildered, she covered her cheek with her hand, looking up at him.

"Surely you've sucked his cock. Is mine dirty?"

Incredibly vulgar words. Jennie clenched her teeth as pain stabbed into her skull. Her ears rang. She couldn't take it anymore. Scrambling to her feet, she fled.

"Jennie!!!"

She could hear Jongin calling, but she didn't look back. The pouring rain drenched her, and she didn't care. To avoid pursuit by his attendants, she slipped into the palace garden and soon came to a fountain of the male Deity.

Jennie visited this place occasionally when she was tired. It was almost always quiet, so she could be alone here, and even with the fountain overflowing from the rain and the ground scattered with sodden leaves, she felt comforted.

The moment she sat down on the damp stone near the fountain, her tears overflowed. Hugging her knees, she sobbed.

She was so humiliated and ashamed. She had never been with another man, so she didn't understand why Jongin said such things. Where was the man she loved? It felt as if he had disappeared like a dream.

The pouring rain mixed with her tears. Her cheek ached. Between her sobs and the rain, she didn't hear the sound of rustling leaves, but

suddenly the rain stopped. She could still hear it, but it was no longer falling on her. Startled, she looked up.

An immense man stood before her, taller by far than she was and covered entirely in a hooded robe. He was holding an umbrella over her.

Goosebumps broke out on her skin as her heart pounded, aching so much it felt as if it were being crushed. She didn't understand why this was happening.

"Who are you?" She asked sharply, instantly defensive. "Identify yourself."

But he didn't answer. His gaze shifted her cheek and Jennie covered it quickly, embarrassed. She didn't want anyone to see her looking so disgraceful. But the man had been watching her for some time, and he slowly pulled down the hood of his robe to reveal golden eyes.

"Your husband."

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## Chapter 126

### Chapter 126 — Mistake

It was the rudest and most ridiculous thing she had ever heard. But somehow, Jennie couldn't scoff at the foolish words. His eyes were filled with such a tumult of emotions, and all of them were directed at her. Staring into his eyes as though hypnotized, she only belatedly regained her composure.

"Kurkan...?" She murmured, feeling dazed. This handsome man had the brown skin and bright eyes characteristic of Kurkans.

She didn't understand how a Kurkan had entered the palace, however, and then come to this place. Jennie looked up at him suspiciously.

Suddenly, he grabbed her hand, and she let out a cry of surprise, trying to tug free of his grip. The man only narrowed his eyes, glaring at the ring on her finger.

"I think I'm freaking out," he muttered bitterly, and let go of her hand only to pull her into a one-armed embrace, holding the umbrella over both of them.

The moment he hugged her, she froze. She should have pushed him away, but for some reason, she couldn't move. Her body was ice cold from the rain, and he felt so warm. Even her anxiety was immediately soothed. It was as if she had been wrapped in a warm blanket, and for a moment, she forgot everything else.

It startled her to realize that she had just fled into the rain because she couldn't stand her fiancé's touch. But now, in the arms of a stranger, she was completely calm.

Quickly, she tried to push his body away with all her might, but she couldn't budge him.

"Jennie..." Casually, he spoke her given name. It was incredibly impolite to call a royal by their first name without being granted

permission. But a moment later, the man did something even more insolent.

The hand at her waist slid up to grip the back of her neck. Jennie's eyes flew open as the man kissed her.

Startled, she struck his chest, but he only pressed further, stroking his tongue into her mouth. His tongue slid over her teeth, caressing her palate so skillfully that it felt as if he had kissed her a hundred times before. It kindled a strange warmth in her lower belly.

The moment she couldn't bear it anymore and thought about biting his tongue, he pulled away as if he had heard her thoughts. Panting, Jennie stared up at him.

The sound of the rain echoed through the courtyard. Bare tree branches swayed, and mist had appeared.

Her heart was beating so frantically. She felt no revulsion at this man's touch, so why was this happening to her with Jongin?

The man's gaze went to her red, swollen cheek, her rain-soaked body, and the wedding ring on her finger.

"...You," he said slowly. "You must have thought it would be better to die than suffer like this."

She wanted to argue those words, but she couldn't.

The sound of rain filled the silence as she waited for his words.

"But like that day, when you feared my death..." Every word was filled with sorrow, and this man who looked sturdier than anything in the world somehow looked simultaneously frail. "It's the same for me. Ever since I lost you, do you know what I've been thinking about?"

His golden eyes momentarily filled with rage, but quickly that murderous intent vanished. His lips moved, and then he closed his mouth again. Instead, he just ran his hand slowly through her rain-soaked hair.

Jennie was not usually swayed by compassion, but she was trying to understand this man. There was pain deep in her heart, and the urge to comfort him, even though she was not the person he was looking for.

"I think you've made a mistake," she said, more gently than usual. "I'm engaged to someone I've loved for a long time. We'll be married soon."

She couldn't be sure, but it sounded like this man had lost his wife. She could not imagine the pain of such a separation, but she had sympathy for those feelings. She decided to forgive him.

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## Chapter 127

### Chapter 127 — Mystery Man

"I will forgive your discourtesy," she said. "I will pretend nothing happened—"

"Mistake?" He interrupted her generous words. His face was expressionless. "I have never been mistaken. Not once, from the first moment I met you until now."

Jennie was silent. She should call the guards to punish this intruder, but she kept hesitating. She didn't want to.

"Remember me, Jennie," the man said seriously, and she looked at him, bewildered because it sounded as if he were asking her to remember moments that didn't even exist rather than this moment now. The voices of attendants suddenly broke the tense, eerie silence between them.

—*Princess! Princess!*

The voices were approaching. Frowning slightly, the man handed her the umbrella, and Jennie took it automatically. He grabbed the tip of her chin.

"I'll give you the first clue." He said arrogantly. "I'm Liam, the King of Kurkan."

".....!"

Jennie's eyes widened.

"Remember me," the man with golden eyes whispered again. And as soon as the words left his mouth, he disappeared.

Startled, Jennie looked around, but he had disappeared in a blink; there was no trace of him anywhere. The only proof that it hadn't been a dream was the umbrella in her hand.

She felt as if she were waking up from some strange possession.

Holding her umbrella in the pouring rain, she stood unmoving before the fountain for a while before she finally set off. She came across one of the attendants after only a short time, and he ran toward her with a worried expression, grabbing her umbrella.

She couldn't help looking regretfully at it after he took it from her. There were many similar umbrellas in the palace, but for some reason she wanted that one.

Walking toward her palace, she thought of the man who had called himself the King of Kurkan. She couldn't remember him, but he acted as if he knew her very well.

Not much was known of the Kurkans. But Jennie was a public figure. Anyone could act as if they knew her, if they gathered the details about her already available. But what would be the point of doing that?

The Kurkans had been invited to the wedding. They knew that Jennie was to marry the King of Estia.

There was no reason for him to act that way, and his emotions had seemed too intense and genuine to be feigned...

Her thoughts were interrupted by the sight of the person waiting for her in front of her palace.

Standing in the rain without an umbrella was Jongin, with several attendants waiting with him.

"....."

Looking into his cold blue eyes, she walked slowly toward him, and he waited like a statue until she was close enough and then embraced her roughly, burying his face in her neck. She felt slight revulsion, but it was tolerable.

His body was cold. He must have been waiting in the rain for a long time. But while she was in his arms, Jennie thought of another man, a man whose body had been so very warm...

After he had held her for a long time, Jongin lifted his head to

whisper.

"Please say you love me."

There was a hint of fear in his broken voice. She didn't know what he was afraid of, but she knew the answer he wanted.

"I love you," she answered quickly.

Jongin hugged her tighter in the rain, and only when she began to shiver with cold did he speak again.

"...Let's go inside."

Kissing her forehead, he grabbed her hand to lead her into her palace. She followed behind him as if she were being dragged, and looked back.

The rain was falling harder. Jennie looked back at the garden, obscured by rain and a faint mist, and kept walking.

She was still thinking about golden eyes.

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## Chapter 128

### Chapter 128 — Peach Tree

In one of Jongin's earliest childhood memories, he remembered something his mother had told him, when he still had blond hair.

*—From this day forward, you will be Estian royalty.*

Even when he was a child, Jongin knew that the royals of Estia were born with silver hair. But after Cerdina made him drink a strange liquid, he had begun to have silver hair. Suddenly, he entered the palace, and everyone called him Prince.

That place was filled with people who envied his sudden change in status and despised him because he was the product of an extramarital affair. It was hard for a little boy to cope with that treatment.

Jongin hated the palace. He asked Cerdina to go home, but she refused. She said she would do anything else he asked, but not this.

The days were horrible. One day, he was summoned to have a meal with his father, the King. Jongin walked to the main palace, his face expressionless.

He disliked having to call an old man his father, especially when they didn't share a drop of blood. He didn't understand how his mother had managed to enter the palace with such an obvious lie.

As he walked, the attendants behind him suddenly all looked in the same direction and began murmuring. Jongin followed their eyes and spotted a peach tree in the distance, on the side of the palace, out of the way. Among the blooming pink flowers, there was a small white hand.

The hand was trying to reach for a flower at the edge of the branch, and finally plucked it away just as the branch broke. All the attendants gasped and shouted at once.

*—Princess!*

They thought she would fall, but the princess suddenly reappeared among the flowers and leaves, holding the flower. Her silver hair shone like a waterfall in the spring sunshine. Smiling, the silver-haired girl greeted Jongin.

*—Hello...! She said kindly. You must be Jongin.*

The branches of the tree swayed, sending down a shower of petals. Jongin gaped at the girl without brushing away the petals that had fallen on his face.

He couldn't look away from the girl's pink cheeks, soft as a peach.

To Jongin, she looked like fresh fruit. As the girl climbed down the tree with her small hands and dropped to the ground, one of the attendants gently scolded her.

*—Why did you come to this place alone? Something might happen to you doing that...*

The scolding was filled with affection, and very different from how they spoke to Jongin. The girl frowned, her lips pouting.

*—I'm sorry.*

*—Don't say that, Princess. The royal family has no need to apologize unnecessarily.*

The girl smiled a little, and though the attendants tried to look serious, they ended up smiling back.

The girl suddenly thrust the flower toward Jongin.

*—You can have this.*

She had nearly fallen out of the tree to obtain that flower. Holding out to Jongin, she added,

*—Next time I'll pick a peach for you.*

*—.....*



Wordlessly, Jongin took the peach flower. His heart was beating so fast. From that day on, he always carried that flower in his pocket.

The flower eventually died, but he didn't throw it away until worms appeared in its petals and it began to smell bad. After that, he went to his mother.

*—I want her.*

Cerdina understood what he wanted. She smiled faintly.

*—It's something you can't currently have, she replied. But...*

*—Then, what should I do?*

Her smile grew wider. In the same way she had said that she would become royalty, she told him calmly,

*—Become the king. Then you can have everything you want under your feet and you will look down on others.*

He had done everything to make those words come true. But even after he became King, he still did not have what he wanted. All he had done was make that woman, fresh and pink as a peach, begin to rot.

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## Chapter 129

### Chapter 129 — Hide

Slowly, Jongin walked through the dark and gloomy palace. Through tall windows that stretched from the floor to the ceiling, the rain fell endlessly. A sudden flash illuminated the night and the lightning was like a scar on the black sky, followed by a roar that shook both sky and earth.

Jongin walked on, indifferent to the storm.

The Tomaris sitting on the floor of the corridor looked at him as he passed. Though they dressed in servants' clothes, their behavior was still crude and mannerless. They didn't even offer proper respect, just hummed songs in a language he didn't understand.

Opening the door to Cerdina's room, he found it warm inside, and saw the silhouette of a woman's body through the bed curtains.

"Didn't you tell me I would have her heart?" He asked seriously.

Sliding out of bed, Cerdina put on a pair of slippers.

She wore only a satin nightgown, but she didn't comment on the fact that he had just awakened her in the middle of the night. She only frowned.

"Why? Won't Jennie listen to you? She didn't tell you she loves you?"

Jongin's lips twisted. "It's different."

After Jennie had been brought back to the palace, Jongin had only been satisfied for a week. It hadn't taken long to realize something was wrong. This was not the love he expected. There were no bright smiles, no intimate conversation, none of the loving jokes that he had wanted.

When he asked her, Jennie would say she loved him, like pulling the string on a broken doll. Her love was based entirely on what she had experienced with that savage. Her memories of that man had been

replaced by Jongin. Therefore, he still had not gotten what he wanted.

Two months had passed since she had returned to the palace. But their relationship stagnated. She did not really love him. His frustration with the incongruity pushed him to the edge, and the madness in his blood worsened every day.

"She doesn't love me like she did that man."

Silently, Cerdina looked at him. He had changed clothes, but his hair was still soaked from the rain, and droplets trickled down his face. Glancing at the window, her long eyelashes fluttered as she watched the rain through the gaps in the curtains.

"You're being too gentle. You know it, too." There was a hint of irritation in her voice. "The girl is yours, Jongin. The control is yours."

Stepping closer to Jongin, she ran her hand through his damp hair.

"Don't let Jennie defeat you. Okay?"

He didn't answer, and she sighed.

"Maybe you're worried because he's still alive," she murmured. With a wiggle of her fingers, black smoke appeared at her fingertips. "I will turn the emissaries of every country that attends your wedding into dolls. The barbarians will kneel to you."

Black smoke oozed through the small cracks in the windows, and the sound of rain diminished, and then disappeared. Drawing the curtains back, Cerdina looked out the window. The rain had stopped. Smiling, she looked back at Jongin.

"Now I'm no different from a god."

"You can't even give her heart to me," Jongin said ironically. "You talk too much."

Her smile faded. Her words snapped out arrogantly, as if the whole world already belonged to her.

"If we just kill the barbarian..."

But she trailed off. A cool breeze blew into the room from the windows as the warmth escaped outside.

"I don't need the crown, the throne, or the continent. That is your wish. I have wanted only one thing from the beginning." Jongin was menacing. "Please keep your promise. Mother."

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Ironically, after he had slapped her, Jongin had waited for her in front of her palace for a long time.

After she dried herself and changed clothes, he applied ointment to her swollen cheek, and only left her after she had fallen asleep.

The next morning, Jennie woke up early. But instead of rising immediately, she lay in her bed for some time, thinking.

Normally, she would have ignored what he had done, or excused it because she loved him. But this time his actions stuck in her mind. He had treated her like an object. He had humiliated her.

Perhaps it was because of the strange man she had met.

The King of Kurkan...

She struggled to push the golden-eyed man from her thoughts. It seemed the security around the palace needed to be increased.

Her day began as usual. Countess Melissa came to attend her, and Jennie listened to the day's schedule and decided to have a light breakfast in her room.

But as soon as the food was brought to her room, Jennie frowned. The meat especially smelled bad, intensely unpleasant. Even though she hadn't had anything to eat, she felt the urge to vomit.

Just as she was wondering whether to eat her breakfast, her bedroom door opened abruptly, without the courtesy of a knock.

"Good morning, Jennie."

Smiling, Cerdina entered the room as if it were her own. Her gaze shifted to the plates in front of Jennie.

"You were eating?"

An instant, instinctive thought popped into Jennie's mind.

*'She can't find out.'*

Jennie didn't understand why Cerdina shouldn't find out, but she hid her nausea under a casual smile.

"...Yes, I've been eating."

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## Chapter 130

### Chapter 130 — Nausea

Jennie rose from her seat and slipped on a robe. As soon as she was away from the food, she felt as if she were coming to life. But Cerdina moved over to the breakfast table and sat down.

"Let's talk while you eat," she told Jennie with a smile. "I don't want to interrupt your breakfast. Jongin will make a fuss."

If Jennie lost weight, Jongin would blame his mother. Cerdina shook her head as Jennie reluctantly sat back down.

"Could you pour us tea?" Jennie asked Countess Melissa.

"Yes, Princess."

Helplessly, Jennie lifted her cutlery, trying as much as possible not to smell the food. She could feel sharp eyes on her.

"You don't look well."

"I have a slight headache. Thank you for worrying about me." Jennie nonchalantly popped a forkful of food into her mouth and swallowed it. Then she forced a smile.

Unmoving, unblinking, Cerdina watched as Jennie's hands moved mechanically under the pressure of the Queen Mother's gaze. For as long as Jennie could remember, Cerdina had always been kind and gentle to her, but Jennie was afraid of her without even knowing a reason. Whenever she was in her presence, fear gripped her as if it had been engraved into her bones.

Jennie couldn't understand her. Their personalities and the ways they thought were entirely alien to each other.

After Jongin's ascension to the throne, Cerdina had been given the title of Queen Mother, though didn't like being called that. She believed it made her look old.

Perhaps due to her obsession with her youth and beauty, Cerdina looked far younger than her actual age. Often she liked to seduce the younger knights in the palace, and occasionally she even held orgi3s that included other women. It was not a secret. Cerdina made no effort to hide it, so even Jennie had heard about it.

That was another area in which Cerdina differed greatly from Jennie. Sometimes she asked openly if Jennie had had sex with Jongin. But even that was not as disturbing as the pure malice Jennie sometimes saw in her eyes.

Unblinking, the Queen Mother watched Jennie as she chewed quietly and swallowed.

"Is there something you want to tell me?" Jennie asked.

A smile appeared on Cerdina's expressionless face.

"No. I'm just enjoying watching you eat." She glanced down at the food in front of Jennie and pointed. "You don't like that?"

It was thin slices of dried ham. Jennie had avoided them because of their unpleasant smell, but now that Cerdina had pointed it out, she had to eat it. Poking at the thin strip of meat with a fork, she put it on a piece of bread and took a bite. Cerdina watched as she chewed, swallowed, and bit again.

Countess Melissa appeared with a cup of tea and placed it before the Queen Mother, and she turned her attention to that instead, looking around the room rather than at Jennie. As soon as she stopped watching, Jennie set down her cutlery, measuring the quantity of food she had consumed. It was the usual amount she ate in the morning, but she would have liked to eat less.

There was an unpleasant sensation in her mouth as soon as the Countess handed Jennie a cup of tea, but Jennie drank it quietly, listening as Cerdina began to talk. There was no significance to her meandering stories; she was only filling the silence while Jennie drank. Finally, Cerdina rose from her chair.

"I have to go. I have brought you some medicinal tea, you must drink

it three times a day." Cerdina reached out to cup Jennie's cheeks in her hands, peering into her eyes. "If you have any problems, tell me."

"...Yes, I will. Thank you for taking care of me."

A finger gently brushed the cheek that Jongin had slapped.

"I love you as if you were my real daughter." Cerdina kissed the red, swollen cheek, and departed.

As soon as she was gone, Jennie turned to the Countess.

"Let's go for a walk for a while."

Together they walked in the garden behind her palace. Since it was close by, there was no need for the other ladies to accompany her.

The garden looked shabby. All the flowers and trees were dead, leaving only thorny gray-green bushes. Surveying the pitiful state of the garden, Jennie turned to the Countess.

"I'm cold. Could you bring me a blanket? And some tea to drink? I will be at the tea table."

Jennie's stomach churned as she watched the Countess returning to the palace, and she turned to walk calmly through the garden. As soon as she was sure the Countess was gone, she counted to thirty in her mind and went into the bushes.

She felt so nauseous. Jennie gagged and retched into the bushes, vomiting in agonizing spasms until she staggered, clinging to a bush.

"Haa, ha..." Gasping, she pulled out a handkerchief to wipe her lips. She couldn't believe she had been able to hold back her nausea for so long. She was so dizzy, she had to cover her eyes with her hands.

Normally, she would have just said that her stomach was upset to avoid eating. Cerdina often hinted that Jennie needed to be careful with her diet if she wanted to keep her figure, so surely she would have preferred if Jennie skipped breakfast.

But as much as Jennie wanted to please her, strangely the thought



that she should hide her nausea filled her mind.

Why am I doing this?

It seemed that something had been wrong ever since she met that strange man the night before. There was a cracking sound in her ears, an echo of the noise she heard every day.

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Lately, Jennie had eaten very little.

No matter what she ate, her stomach rejected it. Fortunately, she had gotten sick from being out in the rain, so she had an excuse not to eat. She had no appetite.

Sometimes even a light soup made her nauseous, so she secretly vomited. Watching Jennie get thinner day after day, Jongin was furious. He wanted to expel all her ladies-in-waiting from the palace, but she managed to dissuade him.

Though she felt nauseous no matter what she ate, there was something she craved. It was a taste she couldn't clearly remember, but she longed for it even as she ate and vomited day after day.

Even as she grew thinner, the emissaries for the wedding celebration arrived, and Jongin went to welcome them personally.

The banquet was expected to last for two weeks as delegates arrived from countries all over the continent. Jennie hoped for many diplomatic connections and accomplishments while so many were in Estia, but Jongin was opposed to her meeting them. He even tried to dissuade her from attending the welcoming banquet.

"You don't have to go."

Before, she would have meekly done as she was told, but on this occasion she strangely had the will to argue.

"It would be impolite. The emissaries came for the wedding celebration..."

Kurkan had also sent emissaries, and she was surprised to discover that their King had come with them. She wondered if the man who had spoken so much nonsense in the rainy garden really was the King of Kurkan. Though warnings sounded in her mind at her own dangerous curiosity, she wanted to meet them.

"What will the others think if I don't attend?"

Listening to her persuasion, Jongin suddenly grabbed her hand, looking at the ring she wore as he entwined his fingers in hers.

"Do you love me, Jennie?"

"I love you," she replied, with the affectionate smile that pleased him. Jongin looked intently at her, beautiful in her exquisite dress.

"...Even if she's a shell, she's definitely mine." He murmured softly, and finally agreed to allow her to accompany him. "Let's go together. I think it's all right to show you off in front of them."

Together, they walked into the banquet hall. Night had fallen, but the palace was so brightly lit, it was as if it were day. Though the music from the banquet hall flowed out the doors and windows, it could not diminish the gloomy atmosphere of the palace. The two walked together, trailed by attendants and ladies-and-waiting, down a long, brightly lit corridor until Jongin came to an abrupt halt.

At the opposite end of the corridor, a group of strangers appeared. Tall, brown-skinned, and beautiful, they were obviously Kurkan, and led by a man with golden eyes.

When the man stopped, all the Kurkans behind him did the same. Jennie stared at him, and he stared right back at her.

Those eyes were so peculiar, just as they had been the first night she saw them. The golden eyes shone as if they were filled with light, drawing people in.

Jennie gazed into them as if hypnotized, and only shook herself when she felt the eyes of the other Kurkans upon her.

All of the Kurkans were looking at her, and for some reason there was anxiety in their eyes. Suddenly, she felt uncomfortable, having her arm linked with Jongin's.

"Let the light shine upon Estia." The man with the golden eyes said with a deep voice, and his eyes looked only at her. "I'm Liam, the King of Kurkan."

At that moment, she had the strongest sense of déjà vu, as if this moment had already happened before.

Just as her lips parted to speak, Jongin let go of her arm and caught her by the waist, dragging her toward him so that she staggered, clinging to him.

"Thank you for coming all this way, King of Kurkan!" Kissing her on the cheek, there was a twisted smile on his face as he added, "This is my future wife."

Jennie's eyes widened, puzzled at Jongin's sudden kiss.

"I didn't expect the King to come personally," Jongin said, cocking his head. "We will have an even more magnificent wedding with your presence."

Jennie could feel the Kurkans' mood shifting and turning fierce, but Jongin was pleased. Her eyes went to the King of Kurkan, and the man called Liam answered calmly.

"You really didn't expect it? I'm sure you assumed I would come."

"I thought you wouldn't come because you were much later than I thought," Jongin replied. His hand caressed Jennie's waist. The man looked pointedly at that hand.

"...I have heard that in Estia, thieves have their hands cut off," he said slowly. "What is the punishment for men who covet other men's wives?"

"Well, I wouldn't know. I've never coveted one." Jongin smiled mischievously. "From the beginning, I've only wanted my future wife."

The other man smiled.

"It's the same for me. When a Kurkan.." His golden eyes turned to Jennie, who stood like a doll with Jongin's arms around her. "...decides upon their mate, they will chase them for the rest of their life."

Jennie realized that she had been holding her breath throughout this confrontation. The man bowed his head slightly, ending their conversation.

"We will enjoy the feast you have prepared."

With that, the man left first, followed silently by the other Kurkans, and they soon disappeared in the direction of the banquet hall.

"Arrogant bastard," Jongin muttered, cursing. Jennie looked down, pretending not to hear the crude words, but he grabbed her chin and lifted her head to look into her eyes.

"....."

He looked at her for a while, as if he were searching for something, and then let go of her chin.

"Come on."

All of it seemed strange to her, but even if she asked, Jongin wouldn't tell her anything.

Liam. Jennie repeated his name in her mind. He hadn't lied to her. And now that she knew he really was the King of Kurkan, she was only more curious about him. If she had a chance, she would have liked to speak to him privately. But she would have to be careful. Jongin was extremely jealous; he didn't like Jennie speaking to other men at all. If he found out that she had kissed a King from another country, and a man with whom he had an antagonistic relationship...

He would not forgive a mistake like that.

Pretending she didn't know the man was the best choice. Jennie suppressed her emotions and followed Jongin.

The moment the banquet hall doors opened, her face paled. The air was thick with scent. The smells of cosmetics, food, and alcohol immediately made her feel nauseous. Her corset was too tight and she hadn't eaten recently, so she thought she might faint any second.

Drawing a deep breath, she suppressed the urge to run away instantly. She would endure for a while, and then she could go directly to the lounge.

Both she and Jongin received affectionate greetings.

The Estian nobles smiled happily, praising the pair, exclaiming over how good together they looked.

After they had exchanged greetings, Jongin left her to go speak to the emissaries. Jennie had wanted to accompany him, but he had refused.

Left behind speaking with some of the ladies, Jennie discreetly examined the emissaries.

Unlike the laughing and boisterous Estians, the dignitaries from other nations were more restrained.

Their expressions were subtle and they were carefully hiding their emotions. Whenever they made eye contact with Jennie, they quickly averted their gaze.

Watching the emissaries, Jennie frowned. They seemed strangely uncomfortable in the cheerful and fun atmosphere of the banquet.

In the past, she would have ignored it and thought it insignificant. But today it bothered her. The word why came to mind, making her feel strangely alienated, as if she stood separate from everything, watching puppets put on a show.

"Jennie."

A soft voice startled Leah from her thoughts and Cerdina hugged her lightly.

"You look so beautiful. Your gown looks even better with the weight

you've lost." Cerdina smiled as she praised her. "Are you drinking medicinal tea?"

Jennie had been vomiting up everything she consumed, so the medicinal tea was composting in the garden behind her palace. But Jennie only gave a slight smile in response.

"Yes, the ladies-in-waiting at the princess's palace always take good care of me."

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## Chapter 131

### Chapter 131 — Emotional Whirlwind

"Good. I gave you the tea because you're not feeling well, so be sure to drink it."

As the listening ladies praised Cerdina for her thoughtfulness and attentiveness, Jennie offered her own thanks.

"Enjoy the banquet. I must converse with our guests who have come so far," Cerdina said, smiling broadly as she observed the nearby dignitaries. "We must be diligent today if we want a magnificent wedding celebration."

The Queen Mother went to where Jongin was standing to speak to the gathered emissaries. They had looked uncomfortable, but their expressions became more natural as they talked to her. Except for the Kurkans.

They stood apart like an island in the banquet hall.

They had come to partake of the banquet, but their faces looked so ferocious that no one dared to approach them. Even Cerdina had not yet gone to speak with them.

Jennie's attention automatically focused on the Kurkans. It would be bad if Jongin caught her watching them; he seemed to dislike them.

After she spoke for a while with the ladies, Jennie discreetly approached Jongin to tell him she was going to rest in the lounge. He was laughing loudly as he spoke with the emissaries from the southern countries, and maybe drunk; his face was flushed and he seemed to be in a very good mood.

"Your Highness."

"Oh, my wife is here."

She was not his wife yet; they had not yet been married, but Jennie ignored it. Jongin introduced her to everyone, hugging her to him

and kissing her neck. Jennie shrugged uneasily.

I wish he wouldn't do this in front of people...

She had also disliked it when he kissed her cheek in front of the Kurkans. But Jongin wouldn't stop just because she didn't like it. She had to tolerate this kind of thing because she loved him. After she had submitted to it for a while, she gently pushed Jongin away.

"I'll be back in a little while, I need a short break in the lounge."

"All right."

With his permission, Jennie hurried out of the banquet hall. Her nausea had only gotten worse with contact with Jongin. Countess Melissa followed her, accompanying her to the lounge.

Lately, Jennie had felt burdened by her ladies-in-waiting. Unless it was for official business, she preferred to have only Countess Melissa accompany her. Of course, the Countess also burdened her, but it was better to be followed only by her chief lady-in-waiting.

In the past, she'd had a close relationship with her ladies, but now they made her uncomfortable.

Everyone's personality seemed to have changed.

Now that she thought about it, it all seemed so strange. So many things she had ignored until now were obvious. Looking back, she wondered how long all of this had been going on.

Suddenly, she realized she had arrived at her palace. Countess Melissa should have stepped forward to open the door, but she had not. Jennie turned around, her eyes widening.

She tried to scream, but nothing came out. One of the Kurkans had covered her mouth with a large hand, and the bronze-complexioned woman apologized, as if she were embarrassed.

"Oh, Jennie, I'm so sorry to startle you..."

Jennie looked around her. A thin Kurkan man was dragging away the



unconscious Countess, and as soon as she met his eyes, he lifted a hand in greeting.

"You two will only talk for a moment," the Kurkan woman said, holding Jennie tightly, "but that will be enough." Gently, she pushed Jennie into the lounge, and the door shut behind her. Jennie's lips parted in astonishment.

It was Liam. The man had boldly entered the lounge of the princess's palace and was sitting in an armchair.

"Hi," he said casually.

Slowly, he stood and approached her. Her heart pounded as he drew near, and Jennie backed up until her back struck the closed doors.

"If you plan to profane me...!" She shouted, her voice trembling.

Liam's eyebrow lifted.

"If I intended to, I would have done it in front of the fountain."

"....."

Jennie covered her mouth with her hand, shocked by the rude words. The man's hands pressed against the door on either side of her, trapping her.

Suddenly, a scent came to her nose. She didn't know what scent he was wearing, but the refreshing smell was so pleasant, she even felt the upset in her stomach subside. It was so startling, she was sniffing discreetly as he spoke again.

"I won't do anything you don't want me to, Jennie."

Absorbed in the fresh scent, Jennie pressed her lips together. I won't do anything you don't want me to.

Every word this man from the desert spoke made her feel strange.

"But, at least we could kiss," he added nonchalantly.

".....?"

"You need it, too. Of course, if you want to do something else, that would be welcome."

"I don't need it," Jennie refused flatly. Even if he was the King of Kurkan, he couldn't treat her like this. It was time that she corrected him. "We have already confirmed our identities. You must behave properly."

But Liam turned a deaf ear to her words. He looked at her carefully, particularly at her skinny shoulders, and then muttered a few incomprehensible words.

"If you were in the desert, you would be treated so incredibly well..."

Jennie bit her lips. Every time he spoke, her heart pounded. His scent, his voice, his gaze, even the warmth radiating from his body made her nervous.

Her mouth went dry, and suddenly she had a throbbing headache. The words of a stern voice throbbed with the pain.

*—Leave this place immediately.*

It was a command, sharp and authoritarian, but today she rebelled. She wanted to talk to this man some more. When she raised her head, she saw his golden eyes looking at her.

"So, have you remembered anything?" He asked her bluntly.

"How can I remember someone I've never met?"

He frowned at the prickling words, and seemed to think for a moment before he produced a small box.

"Second clue," he said, opening the lid to reveal dark brown fruits. Jennie looked at them curiously.

What's that?

It was the first time she had ever seen them, but they smelled so

good, her mouth instantly watered. She couldn't take her eyes off them.

"They're dates." Liam smiled and held the box out to her. "It's a present."

She forgot all about manners. Grabbing the box, she ate one immediately, the sweet taste spreading through her mouth, sticky on her tongue. Her cheeks flushed and her eyes widened as she exclaimed inwardly. This was the taste she had missed.

Unconsciously, she had been searching for it. Dying for it.

After swallowing the first one nearly whole, she hastily shoved the rest in her mouth, as if she had never been nauseous a day in her life. The food was so delicious, she was nearly crying as she ate.

In a blink, the box was empty. She looked at it with regret for only a moment before she regained her composure and closed the lid. No matter how hungry she was, she had to maintain her dignity. She was in front of a King from another country...

She was so embarrassed, she wished she could hide.

What a glutton she must look like, just as Cerdina said. And she still wanted more. She wanted to fill her empty stomach until she was bursting.

There was no way to get more. She couldn't ask her ladies-in-waiting to get them. If she made such an unusual request, Jongin and Cerdina would surely hear of it, and if they happened to ask why she wanted them, she would have no believable excuse.

The only way to get more dates was from the man in front of her.

Savoring the lingering sweetness in her mouth, Jennie risked a request.

"Ca...can you..." Her voice trembled, and she flushed as he cocked his head at her. "Can you give me some more...?"

Liam covered his mouth with the back of his hand, and she reddened

as she realized he was holding back laughter.

"There is one condition." He touched her lips with his finger, a gesture that made his price clear. A kiss. Jennie's expression turned rigid.

"I have a couple," she said.

"Me, too." He didn't back down at all. His voice was quiet. "If you don't want to, that's fine."

"....."

Jennie's lips tightened. She hadn't been able to eat anything for so long. And now that she had found something she could eat, it was so hard to resist. She kept remembering the taste of the dates she had just eaten, and hunger clouded her reason. The self-control she so firmly maintained shattered.

She would kiss him, because she was hungry. Jennie looked at his lips. When he had kissed her before, she hadn't disliked it at all. It had even given her pleasure. Would it feel the same as it had that night in the rain? Ignoring the warning in her head, she rose on tiptoe, resting her hands on Liam's chest.

Her eyes widened as his face approached hers. As their lips made contact, she shuddered. The moment she thought about drawing back, he pounced.

The man's body was so warm. She couldn't resist his sudden surge toward her and her back slammed into the door as he wrapped the reluctant Jennie in his arms. Before she could think to protest, a deep kiss followed, as one of his hands grasped her waist and the other the back of her neck.

A passionate flame blazed through her body as his hand slid from her waist to her breast, and she felt a thrill of pleasure as he brushed her nipple.

"Oh, stop...!"

Belatedly, she pushed him away and stared at him, her eyes

trembling. His warm golden eyes were almost hypnotic, and all she could hear was the sound of their breaths, panting together. Her mind was chaotic. It was the first time in her life she had experienced carnal desire, and she quickly averted her gaze.

"...stop," she whispered. "Release me."

But his strong arms only held her tighter, and she pushed at him again, forcing the words through her teeth.

"Please..."

Guilt washed over her. She couldn't believe she had betrayed the person she loved, the person who had been at her side for so long, and all for such a simple wish. Liam could read the guilt in her face. His eyes narrowed.

"Tell me what's so good about him, and I'll release you." He was obviously referring to Jongin. "He doesn't seem to care about you."

"It's because I like him," Jennie said firmly, hoping he wouldn't pry any further.

"Why?"

Jennie hesitated. No immediate answer came to her.

She loved Jongin automatically, the same way the sun rose and the moon set. She felt a strange aversion to the mere thought of questioning this absolute truth.

"He's very sweet," she answered carefully, after a long hesitation.

Though he had changed now, in the past, Jongin really had been sweet to her. Liam scoffed.

"I'm sure that guy forced you."

"No! I confessed my feelings first!" Jennie retorted angrily, but then stopped short as Liam's eyes suddenly turned fierce.

"...You?" He asked grimly. "How?"

She didn't understand why she owed him an answer, but somehow she found herself revealing that very personal story.

"In a peony garden..." She said. "I confessed my feelings--"

"Peonies?"

The sharp interruption frightened her. He looked as if he might kill someone right that instant, and she shrank back instinctively.

"Ah. The peony garden..." He went on. Jennie was so afraid she couldn't speak. "You must have been holding a flower when you confessed." His golden eyes glinted. "You were trembling and your face was red, and yet you asked to become a wife..."

Banging on the door, he shouted in the Kurkan language, unintelligible words spat with obvious fury. His face contorted as Jennie listened, stunned, and his fist pressed against the door shook.

Suddenly, he pulled her into his chest, and she stood paralyzed as he held her tight. He spoke her name.

"Jennie..."

This arrogant man shook as if he might collapse, and suddenly her eyes filled with tears. She felt like she would cry, even though there was no reason to weep, and she managed to blink them back.

Slowly, Liam drew deep breaths as he hugged her, and his animal-like ferocity subsided.

"You thought this place was hell before," he whispered, looking at Jennie. "Now you don't even know."

It was an incredibly rude thing to say. She should rebuke him. But she couldn't speak. It was as if her lips had been glued together. His large hand covered her cheek, the same cheek Jongin had slapped the other day. His long fingers caressed her gently.

"What should I do, Jennie?" He asked softly. "Shall I kill them, and we'll go to the desert?"



## Chapter 132

### Chapter 132 — Ideas

Jennie did not answer hastily. Liam had spoken lightly of death, but there was no hint in his eyes that he was joking. If she made a mistake, even a single word, something terrible could happen. As she kept her silence, his eyes slowly narrowed.

His fingers gently brushed her reddened eyes, and her eyelashes trembled at the tingle of his touch.

"...I have been very fierce," Liam murmured, looking at her watery violet eyes.

Jennie didn't deny it, but she didn't agree either. It was certainly frightening when he raised his voice and acted violently, but somehow she had a strange, unfounded confidence that this man would not harm her. She had only met him twice in her life, so she didn't understand why she felt that way.

Just as she was wondering whether or not to tell him that it didn't matter, she heard a distant whistle.

"The thief has good timing," he said, with irritation in his golden eyes. Bending, he kissed her forehead, so quickly that she didn't have time to reject him. "Remember me, Jennie."

With those brief words, he seemed to merge into the darkness and disappear, and Jennie's hand reached out unconsciously to the place he had been.

"Jennie!" The door to the lounge abruptly opened and Jongin entered, very drunk. Since she had not returned to the banquet hall for a long time, he had come to fetch her.

For a moment, his eyes went over the lounge as if he were inspecting it, checking to make sure no one was hiding there. Jennie glanced discreetly at the door, worried that there was some evidence of Liam's violence against it, but it didn't appear to be broken.



"Why are you alone?" Jongin asked, after he had confirmed there was no one lurking in the lounge.

"Countess Melissa is running an errand," Jennie answered without hesitation. Actually, she didn't know where the lady was, but she was sure if she said that, Liam would take care of everything. Jongin smiled at her reply and hugged her.

"Jennie." He smelled strongly of alcohol, and her stomach, which had just settled, instantly began to churn. Jennie tried to hold her breath. Jongin was oblivious to her discomfort. "You like peaches."

Really? She liked peaches, but no more than any other fruit. But when Jongin said that, it was best to pretend it was true. She didn't want him to get angry with her for contradicting him.

"I won't give you a quill. I'll give you peaches. No, I will give you a peach orchard and turn it into a villa." His voice quickened as he spoke excitedly. "And flowers. You like flowers, don't you? I'll plant all the flowers you want." He smiled like a child. "We'll take a vacation when the villa is finished, and cover everything with new memories..."

He looked happy, imagining his future with her. He was drunk and filled with dreams. But Jennie didn't share those dreams. Her mind was occupied with other thoughts.

A rough man, fierce, but warm and comfortable. The heat of his body had made her feel light, and she would never weary of the fresh scent that clung to him.

Thinking of Liam, Jennie closed her eyes. Only a fool would risk their life for a forbidden love. But she was doing that right now, even though she would soon marry a person that she had loved for a long time.

But she couldn't fight it. The presence of Liam, outside all logic and reason, was ruining her life.

Suddenly, her left hand felt heavy. The engagement ring on her finger bothered her as much as if she had been handcuffed. Jennie squeezed

her hands together.

A man who claimed to be her husband. A man who was trying to get her to retrieve memories that had never occurred. She didn't even know what memories he was referring to. But she was sure of one thing.

She was so attracted to him, she couldn't deny it.

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Haban, Genin, and Morga sat around the unconscious lady-in-waiting. Morga had given her a potion to cloud Countess Melissa's memory, the same strange brew he had used on Seokjin so long ago, when he came to Estia.

As Morga worked rapidly, Haban and Genin sat with grim expressions on their faces. The sorcerer couldn't help clicking his tongue.

Before Jennie and Liam held their wedding ceremony, the Kurkans had learned of the tragedy that had happened during the funeral of the King of Estia. The Queen's completed spell had engulfed the entire royal palace.

She had been pretending that her son was royalty through the use of spells. She had not only changed the color of his hair, but the color of his blood, to turn the humblest into the greatest.

It was a spell she had focused on for at least a decade, and it had been completed the moment a false royal became the true King of Estia. It was a bold and complicated spell that no other sorcerer would ever consider casting. But by succeeding with that almost impossible spell, the Queen had become so powerful, Morga did not dare confront her directly.

And so their King's wife, their Queen, had been snatched away before their eyes.

When they had finally succeeded in restraining Liam, who had wanted to head straight to Estia and begin their conquest, more alarming news had arrived. Jennje appeared to have lost all her

memories and had fallen in love with Jongin. It was more of Cerdina's magic. And Morga had had to confess his own incompetence to his King.

*—I don't think I can break the spells...*

When they examined the spells binding Jennie, fortunately they didn't find any that bound her life.

Even if they murdered the Queen, Jennie would live.

But regardless of whether Cerdina was alive or dead, Morga wasn't sure the other spells could be broken.

Just because a sorcerer died didn't mean their works died with them.

Jennie would still love Jongin. Even if she were brought back to the desert, Liam's wife would love someone else until the day she died.

*—Although highly unlikely, there is a way to do it.*

After many nights of research with the other Kurkan sorcerers, Morga had proposed a solution.

*—Jennie must remember and realize her true feelings.*

It was worth trying because it involved Liam, who was always an unknown quantity to the sorcerers.

Liam was a variable that could ruin the effectiveness of spells. Even over the last few days, just coming into contact with him and exchanging bodily fluids had weakened the spells on Jennie.

More, after their wedding ceremony, their souls were intertwined. They had recognized and welcomed each other as mates. Even if the chance of success was low, it was worth a try.

It was the best hope for success. All the spells binding Jennie linked together like a chain. If she could recover her own memories and emotions, it would even be possible to break through the brainwashing.

*—Things must be done that could stimulate her memory.*

The plan was to go to Estia and help Jennie to remember. And just when this had been decided, they had received a message from the palace, inviting them to a wedding.

As one, the Kurkans had held their breaths. But Liam did not get angry. He was calm when he spoke.

*—I will not see my wife marry someone else.*

But everyone knew this was just the calm before the storm.

*—I will make a decision on the day of the wedding. Until then, I will do my best to get her memories back.*

Even if he couldn't get Jennie's memories back, he would still bring her back to the desert.

*—I'm sure she can do it. With help from me, she will break through it. I believe in her.*

Liam's confidence in her was so great that even Morga, who knew better than anyone else how difficult it would be, couldn't help feeling hopeful.

"I'm done," Morga said when he finished his spell, standing up and shaking off his clothing. Genin and Haban rose beside him as he added, "I have something to ask you..."

Though on the surface everything was going well, Liam was falling apart. This had pushed their King to his limits. And so Morga had thought of another way to help Jennie regain her memories.

"Do you know of anyone Jennie knows who wasn't brainwashed?" He asked. Someone who had not been caught in the Queen's clutches could certainly help stimulate Jennie's memory.

"There is a woman who worked at her palace who left before the funeral," Genin said in answer to the question. She frowned, trying to remember the name.

"Uh...Cinael?" Haban shouted. "Baroness Cinael!"

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## Chapter 133

### Chapter 133 — Busy

Jennie had slept so deeply, it was as if she had swooned after the banquet, and she woke up feeling refreshed. Perhaps it was also because she had managed to eat something without feeling nauseous, but she felt filled with energy. She was even able to get through the lengthy backlog of work she had been forced to postpone.

Countess Melissa didn't seem to remember anything strange about the night before. When asked, she claimed to have stayed in the lounge with Jennie the whole time. Jennie couldn't help wondering how the Kurkans had altered the lady's memory.

As soon as she had addressed the most urgent tasks, Jennie went for a walk in the garden. Whenever she had a little free time, questions invaded her mind.

She couldn't understand how she had known the taste of those dates when she had never had them before, much less why she had craved them so terribly.

She laughed when she realized she was actually entertaining the thought that she had somehow lost memories, as Liam claimed. Was she so easily influenced by that man, that she would believe something so absurd?

But for the next few days, she kept thinking about him. The persistent thoughts seemed to continually expand the territory he occupied in her mind, diminishing the affection she felt for Jongin.

She wanted to see Liam again. She wanted to hear his voice, even if she was flustered every time they met. She thought about him so much, she even caught herself making mistakes in her work.

That was a dangerous level of curiosity. But she couldn't resist this temptation, even though she knew better than to put her hands into fire. His beauty had mesmerized her, as if he were an exotic species of flower.

That was how her days passed. Though she never had a chance to see him again, she couldn't stop thinking about that man.

"You look beautiful, Princess!"

"...Thank you."

The day had come to be fit for her wedding dress, and Estia's best tailors had worked together on an intricately patterned white gown. The beautiful dress fit her perfectly. But even though the tailors and her ladies were excessive in their praise, her face was expressionless as she looked at herself in the mirror.

There was the strangest sense of déjà vu. Had she worn a white wedding dress in the past? Jennie touched the mirror with a lacy, gloved hand, gently rubbing it with her fingers as if it would change the reflection she saw somehow.

"Is anything lacking, Your Highness...?" The tailor asked, and she shook her head.

"No, it's perfect." When she gave them a small smile, they all relaxed, looking relieved. But the second their eyes left her, her expressionless face returned.

She was not excited, even though she would soon marry the man she loved. All she felt was intensely nauseous. Maybe it was just because the dress was heavy and uncomfortable, and she did feel a little better once it was off. As soon as the tailors left, she went back to work.

Her tasks increased exponentially due to the number of visitors to the palace. She also had to make preparations for the wedding, so she was so busy, she had very little time for anything else. As she was engrossed in her work, Countess Melissa appeared in the door.

"Lady Miriel has come."

Jennie's quill stuttered to a halt.

"...I don't suppose she has requested an audience?"

"Yes. Without invitation or prior notice."

It was truly arrogant behavior. Jennie smiled wryly.

Without Jongin's favor, that woman wouldn't be able to set foot in the princess's palace. It seemed that her power had gone to her head. But there was a reason for her arrogance. Jennie had been weak and pathetic before her. Jongin had even slapped her face in front of Lady Mirael the last time they had been together in the room. As Jongin's consort, of course Lady Mirael would despise Jennie, who couldn't even have sex with him.

Jennie didn't hate Lady Mirael. Jongin was mostly to blame. But she wasn't interested in having a relationship with her, either.

"There's no reason for us to meet, is there?" Jennie said coolly. "Please tell her to come another time."

She turned her gaze back to her documents, but she couldn't concentrate. Her thoughts were a tangle.

She knew that if she couldn't make herself have sex with Jongin after they were married, she would be in real danger. The possibility of being set aside as Queen, as her mother had been, had always haunted her.

Trying to have sex with Jongin scared her so much, though. She couldn't understand why she felt so repulsed by it.

Jennie frowned. There was a heaviness in her belly and a little pain. Her period had always been irregular, but lately it had not come at all. And suddenly she remembered that the tailors said her waist measurement had increased slightly. Looking down, it even seemed as if her belly was protruding a little. But that didn't make sense, she was hardly eating at all.

It was worrying. If Cerdina noticed, she would surely reproach her for ruining the shape of her wedding dress.

Jennie forced herself to stop thinking about it before she distressed herself further. She had too much work to do. But as soon as she



started reading through documents about security in the capital, she heard a commotion outside. The door was flung open and a blonde woman entered her office.

"Let the light shine on Estia," said Lady Mirael, moving to stand before Jennie's desk with clicking heels, and smiled. "Hello, Princess."

Jennie did not respond to the greeting. She only turned her gaze to the door, where it was clear that both her ladies and the knights on guard were unsure what to do. Lady Mirael was unwise in entering, but everyone was afraid of Jongin. His aggressiveness was well-known in the palace, and he never forgave anyone that contradicted his will. They must be cautious, because there was no knowing what punishment they might receive for offending Lady Mirael, who had his favor.

Jennie set her quill down with a soft sigh and nudged her documents aside as Lady Mirael sat down.

"I thought you knew the basic etiquette for entering a palace," Jennie said coolly. "You need a new tutor to teach you proper manners, Lady Mirael."

But despite the cold greeting, the lady didn't back down.

"Don't misunderstand me," she said with a wide smile. "I have only come to get to know you better."

Countess Melissa frowned at her overly familiar language and impolite manner. Jennie only looked at the lady in silence. It was better to do nothing, and see how far Lady Mirael would go. The lady's eyes went over Jennie's office and her desk, laden with documents, and then to Jennie's ink-smudged finger and smiled.

Jennie followed her gaze. She had been so busy at work, she hadn't even noticed.

"Work is important, but aren't there other, higher priorities?" Lady Mirael asked softly. "I could help you in many other ways. For example..." She dragged out the word with heavy insinuation. "With His Majesty."

She wasn't done. Appalling as that was, she went on to say something even she couldn't get away with.

"You have to try, Princess. Surely you want what happened to your mother to happen to you."

The atmosphere in the office was rigid with tension.

Lady Mirael looked at her expectantly, and Jennie understood the reason for this visit. It seemed she wanted to provoke an argument. Perhaps she even thought to get Jennie to slap her, so she could go to Jongin and cry that she had been abused at the princess's palace and create a problem for Jennie.

And Jennie just felt overwhelmed with fatigue. She was in no mood to engage in a war of attrition with Lady Mirael. All she wanted to do was go back to reading documents.

"Lady Mirael." Pulling out a handkerchief, Jennie wiped the ink blot from her fingers. "Are you worried about losing the King's favor?"

".....!"

Lady Mirael's expression confirmed that Jennie's hit had landed squarely.

"Then why don't you try to take care of your beauty instead of coming to talk to me?"

"H, how...can you say..."

"You're a consort." Jennie said quietly. "Not the Queen."

Lady Mirael's eyes widened.

"You're a mediocrity who can't even have sex...!" She exclaimed, glaring furiously at Jennie.

"What's going on?" The cold voice echoed through the office, and Jennie and Lady Mirael turned toward the door where Jongin stood, dressed in his hunting clothes and wearing an icy expression.

Dropping the peach blossoms in his hand, he strode over to Lady Mirael and grabbed her by the hair. She was so shocked, she didn't even cry out.

"What's going on?" He asked again.

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## Chapter 134

### Chapter 134 — Different

As Jennie sat frozen, Lady Mirael spoke desperately.

"Your Majesty!" She pleaded, her voice squeaking with distress. "It's a misunderstanding...aghh!"

She didn't have a chance to protest further. Jongin clutched her hair and threw her to the ground. Even as she looked up at him with tear-filled eyes, his gaze remained cold.

"A vulgar bitch who knows nothing..." His leather-gloved hand lifted, and Jennie leapt to her feet.

"Please, stop!" She screamed. As Jongin turned slowly toward her, she hurried around the desk and caught his arm. "I think that's enough."

His reaction seemed so excessive to her, and she wished he wouldn't be so violent. And especially that he would correct the bad habit of slapping with those hard hands. But Jongin ignored her and only stomped down on Lady Mirael's hand with his foot, making her cry out in pain.

"Please, don't!" Jennie protested, and he looked at her with rage.

"How long has this bitch been doing this?"

The way he was grinding Lady Mirael's hand underfoot made Jennie angry. She couldn't understand why he behaved this way, but she was tired of it. And maybe it was simple self-defense. She knew that at any moment, Jongin could turn on her and treat her just as poorly. The thin threads of her control snapped.

"You're the one who caused this," she said impulsively. It was Jongin's poor treatment of Jennie that made Lady Mirael think she could get away with behaving so disrespectfully. None of this would have happened if he hadn't taken a consort.

Jongin's eyes narrowed as he looked at Leah, and his jaw clenched

tight.

"...everyone out." At first, no one moved. Her ladies-in-waiting were too frightened to understand what he meant, and Jongin muttered a curse and shouted. "Everyone get out now!!!"

The ladies left hastily, along with Lady Miriel, leaving only Jongin and Jennie in the office. Though she was afraid he might strike her again, she still spoke.

"You weren't like this before."

In her memory, Jongin didn't treat people like trash.

She had been trying to understand him, convinced that he had become callous because of the pressures of ruling, but she couldn't tolerate it anymore. It felt as if some barrier in her head that had accepted and excused his atrocities had broken.

"You've changed too much," she said, voicing the feeling she had held in her heart.

Jongin didn't answer. He only stared at her in eerie silence, his blue eyes terrified. For a long time, they looked at each other, and he broke the silence first.

"Do you love me?"

For the first time, she didn't answer instantly. But Jongin didn't wait for her reply. He only smiled.

"...It doesn't make sense," he murmured, and then turned and left without another word. The office door thudded shut behind him.

Jennie's legs wobbled beneath her, and she sat down on the floor of her office, her mind in chaos. After a long time, she wondered suddenly if those memories of the past were true.

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Jennie had come to the conclusion that something very strange was happening.

Her feelings of alienation and the discrepancies she had noticed were becoming so obvious, she wondered that she hadn't noticed them before.

There was no way to be sure that she had lost memories, as that man had claimed. But it was clear that there was something she didn't know.

And she knew she couldn't trust anyone, or tell anyone what she was feeling. Count Valtein, Minister Laurent, Countess Melissa, her ladies-in-waiting...all of them were part of it, their discordant behavior contributing to her sense of alienation.

As she worked, Jennie was asking questions that had no answers. She had reached an impasse. But even if she wanted to investigate, she simply didn't have time. By the time she had finished all the things she had to do that day, night had fallen again, and she was too exhausted to think about anything.

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## Chapter 135

### Chapter 135 — Night Visit

Lying in bed, she couldn't sleep, even though she was incredibly tired. After staring blankly at the ceiling for a long time, she slowly got up.

She was too hungry to sleep. Thinking of what she had eaten that day, Jennie realized all she had managed to keep down was fruit and water, since everything else made her nauseous. And she hadn't even wanted to eat that; she had only eaten so that she wouldn't die.

Pacing anxiously up and down the length of the room, she could only walk for a little bit before she had to sit down in an armchair. Physically and mentally, she just didn't feel well. She wanted to eat, but she couldn't, and she felt so weak.

She wanted dates. Just thinking of them made the memory come back so vividly, painfully sharp and haunting. She chewed her lip at the thought of that taste. Liam had lied to her, he had promised to bring her more, but then he had disappeared. She had even agreed to kiss him because she had wanted to eat them so much.

I'm hungry...

Wretched, she hugged a cushion to her belly as if that would satisfy her hunger. She was hungry, but she couldn't have the one thing she wanted, and she was so hungry that she was losing control of her emotions.

She was so hungry, she was nauseous again. Her stomach churned, so terribly empty.

Maybe fresh air would help. Moving slowly, she pushed open the glass door and stepped out onto the balcony. As she gazed at the nighttime palace, resting her hands on the railing, she thought she smelled a fresh scent. When she turned her head toward it, she almost screamed.

Her eyes met the eyes of a man sitting in a nearby tree, smoking a cigar. His golden eyes glinted mischievously.

"Oops, you caught me," he said, and exhaled the smoke with a smile. "I just wanted to smoke a little."

She was so shocked she couldn't speak. Liam pinched out the cigar and stood, clutching a small sack in one hand as he hopped agilely from the tree to the balcony. Though it was a considerable distance, he landed easily, and straightened up in front of her.

"...Jennie?"

Suddenly, her eyes filled with tears. There was something far more important than the fact that he had once again slipped past security and into the palace of the Princess of Estia.

"Dates..." She said, with her eyes burning. Liam blinked at her, bewildered. "You said you would give them to me!" She cried out, fighting to keep her tears from escaping. "Why didn't you?!"

"....."

Liam extended the sack toward her, looking confused. The whole sack was filled with small boxes of dates, and Jennie snatched one instantly, bolting down the dates inside. Opening another box, she ate half, satisfying the worst craving in her stomach, and then went straight into her bedroom to hide the rest, stashing the little boxes all over the room.

The mere thought of having them later made her feel better. Like a squirrel, stockpiling food for the winter. It was only after the boxes were hidden that she realized what she was doing, and she looked back at Liam awkwardly.

"...Ah."

Her face burned with embarrassment and she lowered her head. This was twice that she had behaved like a glutton in front of this man. She couldn't imagine what he must think of her. But though she waited a long time, he didn't speak. And when she slowly raised her eyes, she didn't see the mockery she had expected in his face.



"Are you starving yourself just to fit into a dress?" He asked, interrupting her thoughts.

"No, it's just...I haven't had an appetite lately..."

Liam frowned.

"Why don't you have an appetite?" He asked, his voice sombering.

She didn't know why. When she ate anything other than dates, it made her nauseous and she ended up vomiting everything up. It was ridiculous, and she couldn't even try to explain it. And though she didn't answer, Liam didn't press her.

"You're losing weight," he muttered in disgust, and clicked his tongue. "It's nice outside, why don't we take an evening walk together?"

Once again, he was speaking utter nonsense, but there was no point in reproaching him. If he had ever cared about that, he wouldn't have come in the first place. As Jennie wondered how she could refuse and make him leave, he gently caught her chin.

"I'll give you lots of dates," he said, and his long fingers touched her lips, gently wiping away the little bit of stickiness from the dates at the corners of her mouth. His tongue flicked out to lick his fingertips. "And I'll give you some other delicious things."

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## Chapter 136

### Chapter 136 - Evening Walk

The proposal, delivered in his charming voice, was tempting. Jennie almost accepted immediately, but then she hesitated.

Liam didn't press her. He waited for the answer as patiently as if he had expected her to think about it, and moved around the room in the meantime with a strange familiarity, as if he had been there before and remembered it. As he approached the bed, she hurriedly called him back.

"King..."

"Call me Liam," he said, looking back at her with his golden eyes. "You can also call me Li."

They were nowhere near familiar enough for her to address him with a nickname.

"How could I be so rude as to address you by name?" She answered, avoiding his piercing gaze. "I can't do that."

"Hmm." Liam rubbed his chin with his fingers.

"Well, if you don't, I'll scream."

"...What?"

Liam drew a deep, threatening breath, and Jennie panicked, frightened that a scream would bring her ladies-in-waiting to the room.

"L, Liam!"

He chuckled lightly, and his large hand stroked her head.

"Well done."

Jennie pursed her lips at the warm, tingling glow she felt. She didn't

understand why it felt so good when this man touched her.

"I hope from now on you can talk comfortably," Liam said. She had tried to draw a line, but this man relentlessly broke down every boundary.

"You take your jokes too far."

"Well..." Liam lifted an eyebrow. "I really might have screamed. My patience has been limited lately."

"....."

He said it so seriously, and inwardly Jennie sighed.

She had never imagined she would be called the King of Kurkan by name, but every time he spoke she felt herself being dragged along with him. Their personalities were so different. And yet she had even cried in front of him, when she had asked for the dates.

It did feel pleasant, calling him by name.

Jennie looked at him for a long moment. She had been thinking about him for days, and now he was standing in front of her. It was an absurd and embarrassing reunion, not at all what she had expected, but she decided it was welcome.

"...You said I had lost my memory," she said, remembering the words that had troubled her most. It still sounded ridiculous, but she wanted details.

Right now, there was no one in her life that told her anything at all; everyone just agreed with her and blindly followed her orders. It made her feel very alone.

Liam was the only one that had told her something was wrong. It couldn't hurt to listen to someone who at least had an opinion.

"I'd like you to explain a little more," she said. But surprisingly, he didn't seem enthusiastic about the request.

"If it could be solved in words, I would have done so," he replied.

"They wouldn't be called spells if they were so easily broken."

"Spells...?"

"I am only here to help you, Jennie." He held out his hand, a gesture that meant she would have to go with him if she wanted to learn more.

Jennie drew a deep breath. Though there were dozens of reasons why she shouldn't go, the impulse to take his hand was so intense, she ignored them.

That large hand felt so strong and so warm, and Liam immediately drew her close and lifted her into his arms in one fluid motion.

"You're lighter," he said with a slight frown, as casually as if he had lifted her many times in the past. He headed for the balcony, and Jennie barely had time to blink before they were both in the air.

".....!!"

She was so frightened, she clung to him tightly. She would have thought the noise of their landing would resound through the silence of her palace, but Liam landed on the ground without a single sound and immediately moved on as if nothing remarkable had happened.

Jennie lifted a hand to her pounding heart. One day it was going to burst because of this man.

Liam seemed to know the palace as well as the palm of his hand. It was unsettling that he also seemed familiar with all the various security systems, but now that she thought about it, it was also strange that they had met for the first time before that fountain. It was not a place that anyone in the palace often visited, and she couldn't help wondering how a foreigner from the desert had come there.

Jennie yawned as all these many things ticked through her mind. Drowsiness had been creeping over her for some time, but in the warmth of his arms and with his fresh scent enveloping her, her nervousness faded. Snuggled in his arms, she drifted off to sleep without realizing it.

It was a short nap, but a deep one, and felt as refreshing as if she had slept for several hours. When Jennie woke up, she was outside the palace. After a few moments of blinking around, disoriented, she realized she was still in Liam's arms, walking through the streets of the city at night. She was wrapped in a large robe.

Her eyes widened. It was the first time she had ever left the palace, and she looked at her surroundings with careful interest.

The night streets of the city center were lit with lanterns, crowded and bustling. But strangely these streets did not seem unfamiliar, almost as if she had seen them before in her dreams. She caught a few people looking curiously in their direction, no doubt wondering why the large man was walking along, carrying a small woman in his arms. Jennie tapped his shoulder lightly to tell him she was awake, but he didn't intend to put her down.

"We're almost there."

They arrived at a ramshackle inn that looked as if it might collapse any moment. For some reason, it too looked familiar, and Jennie stared at it as Liam pushed through the creaky wooden door.

"First, eat something..." he muttered. The inn was brightly lit inside and quiet. Though there were no customers, Jennie smelled something so delicious, she had to swallow her saliva. Suddenly, she was as hungry as if she hadn't eaten those dates. Usually the smell of food made her nauseous, but this time it sharpened her appetite.

"Are you hungry?" Liam asked, smiling at the sparkle in her eyes.

She was too hungry to try to save face. Jennie nodded instantly, and Liam strode past the empty tables to the farthest table in the back, pulling Jennie's hood back as they sat down.

"Haban," he said, calling someone over. A Kurkan approached proudly, carrying a tray in each hand.

Jennie recognized him as the same Kurkan that had rendered Countess Melissa unconscious.

"Kurkan food. We cooked the foods you liked in the past, though I'm

not sure if they will be to your taste now," he said as he placed the tray on the table and arranged the plates. "Mura asked me to be sure to tell you she cooked it herself. I made the zaatar manakeesh."

Most of these words made no sense, but his good will was very clear.

"Thank you," she said, startling him with her formal tone.

"Jennie, you can talk comfortably with me..."

"That's enough." Liam interrupted. "Don't ask too much of her."

Haban nodded and walked away, looking discouraged, and Jennie watched him go, intrigued.

Liam caught her face in his hands.

"Don't worry about anything. Eat first," he said, handing her cutlery. Even the utensils had been prepared for her and were perfectly sized for her hands. Jennie began to eat happily. She had never seen this kind of food before, but she felt no revulsion. It was surprising that she could eat it so easily.

As she ate, Liam cut the food into small pieces for her, leaving her with nothing to do but eat and enjoy it. Jennie finished the meal with hot tea. It had been so long since she had been able to eat a decent meal, she felt as if she were coming back to life just at finally feeling full. Even the hot tea was so delicious, she wished she could take the cooks back with her to the palace. If she could have eaten like this every day, she would ask for nothing else.

"Jennie."

Her gaze turned to Liam, and he glanced at her teacup to make sure it was almost empty before he spoke.

"There is someone I would like you to meet."

Instantly, she sensed that it would have something to do with her lost memories. But they had treated her with great hospitality, so she would agree to meet with any person he wished.

The door of the inn creaked open and a woman with a shawl over her shoulders entered. As soon as she saw Jennie, her face twisted as if she were about to burst into tears.

"Princess..."

"Who are you?" Jennie asked, bewildered by the woman's distress.

The woman's eyes widened with shock. But then she pursed her lips, visibly bracing herself, as if she should have expected as much.

"I'm Baroness Cinael," she said firmly. "I used to work as a lady-in-waiting for you, Princess."

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## Chapter 137

### Chapter 137 - Rest

All Jennie knew of the Cinael family was that it was below most of the noble families of Estia, lacking both power and wealth, and this was common knowledge, nothing specific. She had never had anyone from that family as her lady-in-waiting.

But Baroness Cinael only looked resigned at Jennie's bewilderment, pulling out a handkerchief to dab at the corners of her watery eyes.

"I was told the Princess had lost her memory," she said. Her voice was steady and determined.

"....."

That again. Even a noblewoman of Estia was claiming she lost her memory. And it seemed that the Baroness had foreseen that Jennie wouldn't be easily persuaded. She produced a small envelope.

"I want you to look at this," she said, holding it out with trembling hands. The old envelope had clearly been carefully handled, with no crumples. Taking it from her, Jennie opened it carefully. She felt as if she were opening Pandora's box. Her eyes widened as she read the document inside.

It was the bill of sale for a small farm. At the bottom was Jennie's signature, and the seal of the royal family of Estia.

It was impossible. Jennie read it again, disbelieving.

It was inarguable. The signature was her own, and that small farm had certainly been her property.

All of her ladies-in-waiting were from low status families. The salary they received from the royal family was important to them. That was why she had intended to distribute her properties among them, including the small farm on this bill of sale. But apparently she had already given this particular farm away, to a noblewoman she had never seen before, who claimed to have been one of her ladies.



"You gave it to me personally, Princess," Baroness Cinael said cautiously. "Do you remember?"

Of course she didn't remember. Hastily, Jennie rummaged through her memory, but there was nothing there at all, as if someone had taken scissors to that area of her mind. Her expression stiffened, and Jennie's hand lifted to her head.

"Ah..." Suddenly, she had a headache, and she staggered back with a sound of pain. Liam caught her, embracing her as she gasped. The pain throbbed, so excruciating that it was hard to breathe.

Cold sweat poured down her forehead.

Something was pounding on a door in the deepest part of her mind, a phantom echo of a sound that knocked against her ears, and then faded. Slowly, the intense pain in her head diminished.

"That's enough for now." Liam nodded to Baroness Cinael as he hugged the trembling Jennie. The Baroness's eyes were red with tears. "I will pay you for this with gratitude."

"I will not accept it," she refused flatly, wiping the corners of her eyes with her handkerchief. She looked at Jennie, and Jennie forgot her torment for a moment at the sight of the affection in the other woman's eyes.

"I'm not an ungrateful person," the Baroness said.

"You trusted me when no one else did. That moment is engraved in my heart and I treasure it to this day."

Her voice trembled as she looked at Jennie, her mistress, who was being manipulated so cruelly by the stepbrother and stepmother she hated so much.

And now she couldn't even remember that she hated them.

"If I can help you even a little..." Baroness Cinael whispered. More tears fell. She could not hold them back. "...I would be honored, Princess."

And she burst into tears. Jennie's heart shuddered as she watched the noblewoman sob, her shoulders shaking. She didn't even know that woman's face, which made the intensity of the stranger's feelings even more shocking.

Eventually, the Baroness departed, and Jennie sat in pensive silence. Liam said nothing.

"I don't understand," Jennie finally murmured, distressed. "I don't understand...what the hell is happening? I don't understand anything."

Her mind was in chaos. She felt as if it might explode, and she looked at Liam, despairing. She thought he would urge her to remember again, but instead he said the opposite.

"That's enough for today." He hugged her tightly.

"You need your rest. It seems like you haven't even been able to sleep properly lately."

He was right. She had been so hungry lately, she couldn't sleep. That nap she had had in his arms was the most pleasant rest she had had in a while. But it was easy enough to rest now, and she calmly allowed him to lift her into his arms.

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## Chapter 138

### Chapter 138 - Instincts

The wooden stairs creaked loudly as they went to the second floor of the inn. Liam climbed them easily, though they looked as if they would collapse beneath him with one false step, and then went to the room at the end of a long corridor.

The room was shabbier than a stable, but curiously tidy, and for some reason it felt more comfortable than even the glamorous palace. Liam removed her robe and laid her on the bed, then casually laid down beside her. Frightened and still a little dazed, she moved instantly to the edge of the bed, her back pressed against the cold wall.

Liam frowned, watching her.

"I won't do anything," he said, pulling her into his arms. "Sleep. When you open your eyes you'll be back in the princess's palace."

Strangely, those words instantly calmed the swirling thoughts in her head. Jennie closed her eyes.

Had she really lost her memory?

There was a possibility that this man was trying to manipulate her somehow. But try as she might, she couldn't think of any reason why he would.

Jennie realized with shock that she might actually believe him.

A bit. It was hard to doubt him. Inexplicably, she trusted him. Somehow, the simple presence of this man made her trust him. Slowly, her eyes opened, and found those golden eyes looking at her. In the silence, their breaths mingled together.

He watched her, unblinking, and she swallowed.

There was a strange tension in her body, and an instinctive sense of

danger. The longer they looked into each other's eyes, the more nervous she became, and in the end she was forced to look away first.

Her heart was beating so fast as she forced herself to exhale softly. There was a tingling in her belly.

She had always thought that she was repulsed by men's bodies. That was the only possible explanation why she couldn't force herself to have sex with Jongin. But she had been wrong.

She wanted to touch the man before her. She wanted to caress him with her hands, lick him with her tongue, bite him with her teeth. She had never once felt this urge toward Jongin

She would be ruining her life if she allowed herself to give way to these dangerous emotions. But even though she knew exactly the bleak future she would face, she couldn't endure it. She clutched the blanket to her like a shield, but finally, she couldn't resist any longer.

Her lips parted. Her breath escaped, and she looked into the man's eyes. And the second their eyes met, he lunged toward her as if he had been just waiting for her.

"Mm..."

Their kiss was frantic. This man made her feel the same pleasure she always had. No, his kiss was even better than before. When he bit her lips and rubbed her tongue, she moaned, deep in her throat. Her body writhed shamefully with pleasure. She had never felt like this before.

His large hands grabbed her breasts, squeezing fiercely. Her nipples hardened between his fingers, protruding through her thin nightgown as he rubbed them. The shuddering pleasure radiated from her small, tight nipples and Jennie shrugged her shoulders, trying to pull back. But Liam didn't retreat. His thigh pushed between her legs and upward, rubbing against her.

"Ah...!"

Jennie pulled back, breaking the kiss. Her reason had deserted her in the flurry of pleasure, but it instantly reasserted itself.

Liam's eyes curved as he smiled.

"Don't you want to do something even better?" He asked, and moved his thigh slightly, stimulating that forbidden place between her legs. Jennie shuddered.

When she squeezed her legs together, she only made his thigh wet, and she could feel a strange, embarrassing dampness.

Reason fought with instinct, a storm of guilt and pleasure. Her mind was in chaos as he tempted her, gently tweaking one of the tight nipples protruding under her nightgown with his fingers.

"I'll make you feel better." His other hand slid under her nightgown and Jennie covered her mouth with her hand because that touch felt so good. If she hadn't, she would have moaned like a beast.

His fingers were touching the most intimate place on her body. She tingled as he rubbed her through her underclothes. His eyes were lidded, disguising a hunger that wanted to devour her instantly.

"Aren't you curious, Jennie?"

She was ashamed that she was so physically attracted to him, but she also wanted to know why he didn't repulse her as all other men did. And really, curiosity was only an excuse. Even with those questions aside, her desire remained.

She wanted to lie with this man.

But as soon as she felt that sexual urge, a warning echoed in her mind, and she remembered their reality. Her wedding was so near, and she hadn't even allowed her fiancé to touch her...

Belatedly, her conscience reared up and her galloping heart contracted. But Liam even understood this dilemma, without her having to speak a word.

"That guy has been sleeping around with consorts, why should you be faithful?" He asked, and she could not argue. His fingers stroked her soft lips. "I just want you to feel better for a moment."

Curiosity paved the path to hell. Unable to resist his temptation, Jennie finally bit into the apple he was offering her.

"...Yes, I'm curious," she said quietly, looking up at him. "What are you going to do?"

The blanket covering her was thrown aside and Liam was above her so suddenly, she blinked. He was like a beast lunging for its prey.

"In the morning..." Her body stiffened at his seductive words, and Liam smiled. "...and also at night, I will make you think only of me."

His gaze and his voice were so lascivious. Heat rushed to her face, and she brought her hands up to cool her cheeks. He was so smooth, she couldn't help pouting, a little uncomfortable.

"That sounds like something a womanizer would say."

"All is not what it seems."

Her lips pursed, and he took her hand. The heavy engagement ring slid off her finger.

"Let's put this aside for a while."

Fortunately, he didn't throw it away or hide it, just placed it on the nightstand beside the bed. Her hand felt lighter without it, and she stretched her fingers.

Catching the edge of her nightgown, Liam slowly slid it upward, the fabric tickling as it brushed over her skin. Jennie didn't protest as he undressed her, exposing her underclothes first, and then the slight, rounded curve of her belly, finally sliding the nightgown off her completely.

Her breast had been a little swollen lately, making her bras tight and uncomfortable, so she had removed hers for the night before she had gone to bed back at the palace. Without the nightgown, they were exposed to Liam, who examined every inch of her body as if he were searching for injuries.

But then, the first time she had met this man, she had been crying beside a fountain with her cheek tight and swollen from Jongin's slap. He was probably worried that she might have been mistreated again since then.

It was ridiculous. This stranger carried more about her than her fiancé did. Though Jennie tried not to think about it, she couldn't help making the comparison.

But after he had looked at the rest of her body, his eyes drifted up to her white breasts and fixed there.

Under his eyes, her pink nipples hardened, and his large hands squeezed her breasts.

Jennie sucked in a breath. When their eyes met, Liam slowly lowered his head to bite at her breasts, marking the white skin, licking at her nipples ravenously. It was so embarrassing, she closed her eyes, but that only made her other senses that much more acute.

Her eyes opened to find Liam still staring at her. His tongue licked gently, sending a strange tingling deep in her belly. The moment he sucked her into his mouth, biting at her, a searing heat swelled up inside her.

"Ah..."

Her back arched involuntarily, her body stiffening as a strange sensation spread upward between her legs.

Her insides were suddenly wet from some deep place, as if her body was preparing for what was to come.

The hand squeezing her other breast slid downward, gently removing her underclothes. A thin thread of fluid stretched between the thin fabric and the cleft between her legs. It was so embarrassing to see the wetness on her clothing, she wanted to snatch it away and hide it somewhere, but fortunately Liam dropped it off the side of the bed.

One hand gently massaged her foot, then slid upward to her thighs and spread her legs apart.

Jennie had still been dwelling on the state of her underclothes and belatedly tried to close her thighs.

She knew her body was strange compared to others because she had almost no body hair. It was the first time anyone had ever seen her smooth, hairless mound, and embarrassment scorched her.

But Liam didn't seem surprised. He took her hands and placed her fingers where he wanted them, over her smooth lower lips.

"Hold them open," he said.

"What...?"

"Otherwise I won't be able to touch you properly."

He understood this business better than she did, and if he said he needed her to do this, she didn't know any better. Jennie trusted him and obeyed.

Slowly, Jennie spread her legs, holding herself open with her fingers. The air touched her exposed pink flesh and his eyes fastened on her, making her flush with embarrassment and excitement. Wetness coated her and she tingled intensely deep inside.

"Ah..."

She could feel the fluids flowing from inside her.

Liam gently ran his fingers over them, trailing the fluids over her swelling lower lips.

"Are you excited yet?" He asked with a smile as his wet fingers slowly penetrated her vagina. Jennie's thighs trembled at the sensation of those long, hard fingers moving inside her. "You're wet."

She wanted to defend herself, but she couldn't argue.

She was so wet, anyone might have thought she had wet herself. Her tight inner walls clung to his fingers, squeezing. It was an attempt to repel the intruders, but he didn't pull back. Instead, he only pushed deeper.



When his long fingers were deep inside her, he began to slide them in and out, his fingers writhing fast and frantic to stimulate her pleasure. Every time they reached deep into her, her whole body tingled, and her breath puffed out, a sound escaping her throat.

"Hmm, ahhhh..." Jennie moaned, her head shaking from side to side. Her hands, which had been holding her legs apart, slipped.

"Hmm, I can't, hold them anymore...!" She said desperately.

"Then touch this..." Liam shifted his position, pushing something into her hand, and laughed at her startled expression.

Jennie had accepted it without thinking, and now she gaped in shock.

Oh, my God, what is this thing? A snake...?

She had only ever seen Jongin's manhood before, and a moaning Mirael had often declared that it was larger than any other man's. But it was no match for Liam's virility. She had never seen anything like it and stared at it as if it were a poisonous snake.

"It's yours," Liam told her, and she felt the searing heat of it in her hand. "You like this."

He was so brazen as she lay motionless, so bewildered she couldn't even argue, gaping at his manhood in her hand. A groan escaped him as he slowly rubbed his manhood against her palm. The sight of that immense manhood in her tiny white hand was absolutely obscene. Jennie felt as if her face might burst into flames.

"It's, this, it's, it's excessive..." She stammered. She couldn't even get the words out. But then she looked at him.

That wasn't just passion in his bright golden eyes.

They were filled with affection. He lay on his side beside her, slowly slipping his fingers in and out of her.

"Move your hand, Jennie," he moaned, and as she began to awkwardly rub him, he moaned again, his forehead knotted with pleasure.

His other hand slid over her backside, caressing up her back to catch her neck and bring her to him for a kiss. As they kissed hungrily, his fingers continued to slide in and out of her, and a third finger joined the first two inside her.

He exhaled with a hot breath and licked her lips.

Jennie took his manhood in both her hands, dizzy with passion. But the more intense the pleasure, the more guilt she felt, and Jongin's name kept popping into her head.

The emotions flooded through her, so complex and confusing she finally burst into tears. Liam stopped immediately.

"Does it hurt?" He asked softly, and she shook her head. It didn't hurt. That was the problem. She felt no revulsion, only wild, frightening pleasure. She was so confused that the truth tumbled out unstoppably.

"I'm doing this... betraying my fiancé..."

Liam's mouth twisted. His fingers slid into her again, reaching deep inside her.

"You're wrong."

"Ahh...!" The moan burst from her as his fingers moved frantically inside her. It was as if he had just been teasing her before, and she was flooding with pleasure, his fingers making a wet noise as they moved. Her body spasmed and her hands tightened, clutching his manhood, which produced a clear stream of cum.

She wanted to let him go, but Liam closed one hand over both of hers, moving them in unison with the stroking of his fingers inside her.

"You know nothing..." He whispered looking into her eyes. "You shouldn't say that."

Jennie. She couldn't even argue his nonsense. The heat and tingling between her legs were unbearable and she felt as if something was swelling, about to burst.

"Ah, wait, hmm, wait...!" She pleaded desperately, and started to cry. Liam licked her tears.

"Say my name."

Saliva trailed from her lips, parted as she panted, and he licked even that.

"Call me Li," he said, and his deep voice gave her goosebumps. Her lips formed the name naturally, as if she had said it many times before.

"Li..."

At the sound of the incredibly intimate nickname, his fingers moved faster, stroking her more intensely, and though his eyes had darkened at the mention of Jongin, now they glowed. Jennie's belly tensed inside and she moaned.

"Ah, ahh, hmm...!"

The pleasure built up, overflowed, and her reason shattered. Her hips shook like a beast's with the rapid rhythm of his fingers and lewd words poured from her, words that would never have crossed her mind before.

"Ah, this, it's good, hmmm, it's so good, my god..." She had only just been asking him to stop, but now she clung to him and begged, "More, a little more...!"

Her hips rocked in unconscious rhythm as she stroked his manhood in her hands, and her body stiffened, all the new sensations pushing her to the limit. Jennie climaxed, her eyes vague and unfocused.

"Ahhhhhh!"

Her back arched upward. Gasping madly, she buried her face in Liam's chest as her whole body trembled uncontrollably. Her teeth sank into his firm brown skin over and over as the pleasure devoured her, and then she rubbed her face into him, moaning.

"Hmm, ahh, ahhhhhhh..."

She couldn't think of anything. She had forgotten Jongin existed. Her inner walls clenched on his fingers as she trembled, and her normally pale, expressionless face was flushed as she gazed up at Liam with lost eyes. She was helpless at his touch, trembling.

The pleasure was overwhelming. She was so sensitive that she could feel the slightest sensation and his long, hard fingers were still moving inside her, stimulating a pleasure that bordered on pain.

"That's enough...take them out..." She begged, almost sobbing, but his answer was firm.

"Not yet."

He had not even touched her swollen clitoris until now, but now his thumb pressed down on it, and his fingers moved inside her pussy, stimulating both places at the same time. An embarrassed moan escaped her at so much stimulation, and she began to sob, gripping his manhood in her hands. But he still did not stop.

"I have to make sure that you never forget it again..." He whispered, and bit her on the neck. It felt as if a beast had bitten her, and she writhed, almost climaxing again. He was torturing her with pleasure.

"Ah, ahhh...! please stop, stop your fingers...!" She cried, shaking her head, and suddenly fluids gushed from inside her, slicking her thighs. She had cummed again, and she sobbed hoarsely, "Oh, no..."

Her vision darkened, and she sobbed as if a dam had burst.

His manhood quivered and jerked as semen jetted from it, with such force that it stained her belly and breasts. It didn't even occur to her to try to wipe it away. She had no strength left. Her whole body felt like it was on fire as Liam kissed her passionately, and Jennie's closed her eyes.

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## Chapter 139

### Chapter 139 - Ruin

Looking at the unconscious Jennie, Liam sighed. He knew she was in poor condition physically, but he had still behaved ferociously. Shaking his stiff manhood a few times, he drained the last few drops of his semen.

"Ahh..."

Just looking at the white, naked body before him made the heat rise again. Surely, if she saw it, she would be terrified. Frowning, Liam tried to calm down as he cleaned himself and then Jennie, covering her carefully with a blanket against the cold.

Rising to open the windows, he sat back against the headboard and pillowed her head on his thigh, lifting a cigar to his mouth. His eyes half-closed as soon as he drew the first puff, and smoke rose into the air as he exhaled slowly.

He had been smoking significantly more lately. And he knew why. Gazing into the smoke with lost eyes, he glanced down at the woman in his lap. Jennie's silver hair was scattered and disarrayed, sleeping so soundly that no one could dare to wake her.

Gently, he stroked her slender neck with his brown fingertips. Her body was so frail, it seemed even the slightest squeeze would break it. Compared to the strength of a Kurkan, she was as fragile as a newborn kitten.

But this fragile woman could make Liam do whatever she wanted.

The center of his world, the wife who held a part of his soul.

Bending, he kissed her on the head. Liam was not a very emotional person, so he had rarely felt such intense emotions. Except anger. He had felt anger, when he was a child slave.

But since his coming of age ceremony, no one had dared to be reckless with Liam, so there had been no reason to be angry. That

had only changed when he met Jennie again, and for the past half year, he had experienced many emotions with an intensity he hadn't felt in years.

Quietly, he chuckled. Honestly, he couldn't remember most of that day. Only fragments remained. But the moment when his bride had been caught in the black smoke was still horribly vivid. It had shattered him.

He wasn't sure he remembered it correctly. He had been barely hanging onto his sanity when he ordered everyone to Estia immediately. Haban and Genin had sobbed as they tried to stop him, begging him not to go. They had been covered in his blood.

Belatedly, he had realized that all the Kurkans that had attended the wedding were doing the same, throwing themselves on him and clinging to his body to restrain him.

From that moment on, he had had only one purpose.

He wouldn't get her back unless he did it carefully, so Liam tried his best to keep his composure, but he was held together with string. As the days passed, the line between his reason and his nature blurred.

His patience was wearing thin.

Watching Jennie straining to please Jongin made his blood boil. Liam looked down at her left hand, and the red mark on her ring finger, weighted by that heavy ring. Gently, he brushed it with a fingertip, but the mark did not fade.

Slowly, he intertwined their fingers, gripping hers as if he would never let go again, no matter what happened.

In her sleep, Jennie frowned. Maybe he had held her harder than he intended. But he didn't let go of her hand. He couldn't.

Even if she didn't recover her memory before the wedding, he would take her to the desert.

She would surely hate him. She would reproach him for his barbaric

behavior, bound by her love for Jongin. And just as she had been when he kidnapped her the first time in the field of eulalies, she would be frightened.

It would be strange to play that role again, but he would do it if there was no other way. His golden eyes glinted, and the veins in the back of his hands bulged through his skin.

He was being patient. He was being as patient as he could. But he would not see her become another man's wife. He couldn't stand that.

He had already ruined her life once. He would ruin it again, as many times as he had to.

That was why Jennie had to remember the past.

Before he destroyed everything.

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## Chapter 140

### Chapter 140 - Tea

Cerdina looked at the sobbing blonde woman with cold eyes. For some time now, the woman had been soaking her handkerchief and repeating the same words, over and over.

"His Majesty. Hck, how could His Majesty do this to me...how could this happen..."

As Lady Mirael cried inconsolably, Cerdina frowned with irritation. She had allowed this woman to get close to Jongin because she was pretty and stupid, but sometimes her actions were just incomprehensible.

None of this showed in Cerdina's expression when Lady Mirael finally looked up, wiping her tears. The Queen Mother's face was kind and smiling.

"Will you help me...?" Lady Mirael asked. Her eyes were red.

"Of course." Cerdina stroked her cheek as if she were an adorable pet. "I will speak to Jongin."

Lady Mirael let out an exclamation of joy, and Cerdina smiled faintly. She didn't hate people that were honest in their desires. In fact, she liked them.

Life was so short, and the will to give one's all for glory and wealth was like a flame, beautiful, magnificent, even if it was fleeting.

"I hope you will continue to serve me diligently," she told Lady Mirael.

"Yes! Yes...!"

The blonde lady beamed with satisfaction, and departed, promising that she would try harder to take care of His Majesty and keep his bed warm.



Watching the carriage disappear in the distance, Cerdina burst out laughing.

She had been so indescribably pleased when she had heard what Jongin had done. Lady Mirael had been receiving his favor for a long time, but still he had grabbed her by her hair and thrown her to the floor.

It was how Cerdina wanted Jongin to treat women.

Disposable. Objects.

So many monarchs through history had fallen because of a woman. She did not want her son to be tripped up by love.

But unfortunately Jongin was still gentle with Jennie, and did not treat her like other women. Just the other day he had ignored his mother and waited outside in the rain for Jennie to return. It had been very hurtful. Cerdina had barely suppressed the urge to kill her.

From the beginning, Cerdina had planned to give Jennie to Seokjin for a number of reasons, but Jongin's obsession had ruined it.

Through the window of her living room, she looked out on the withered gardens, where a few dry leaves still hung from the trees. They were falling now.

At first, she thought that if she turned all the nobles into puppets, then she herself would have to handle all the affairs of state. But she could make Jennie do all that work, and she was useful in many other ways. Jongin had agreed. He didn't like working, either.

Cerdina laughed maliciously, resting her hand on the window sill.

"...So smug."

From the first spell she cast, she had known Jennie had a strong will. It would not be easy to break and destroy her. So Cerdina had infused a powerful spell into the love potion Jennie had consumed, made with strands of hair from Jennie and Jongin. But even then, it had only been half as effective as she had expected. Even without her memory, Jennie had not given her whole heart to Jongin.

Incredibly, Cerdina had to consider the possibility that Jennie was pregnant.

The blood of the barbarians was quite resistant to her magic. If Jennie had somehow conceived, her baby might have protected her from the potion.

But that was impossible. Jennie should have been infertile after all the spells Cerdina had cast on her over the years. But just to eliminate the possibility, Cerdina had instructed Jennie's ladies-in-waiting to give her tea that would make her miscarry.

It also included an appetite suppressant, as Cerdina couldn't control the princess's diet with Jongin watching so closely. If Jennie were to stand at Jongin's side, she had to look impeccable.

Belatedly, Cerdina tasted blood and realized she had been chewing her lower lip. Her finger tapped anxiously on the window sill.

She would have to cast a new spell to completely subdue Jennie. There was a magic the barbarians used to bind their souls together during their wedding ceremony. Cerdina had no intention of binding Jennie's soul to Jongin, but she could use their wedding to cast a more powerful spell on her.

*-Please keep your promise. Mother.*

Jongin's voice echoed in her hand. Cerdina clenched her trembling hands together.

"I'm a god," she said aloud, nervously. "God..."

So there was nothing she couldn't do.

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## Chapter 141

### Chapter 141 - Locked Up

Jennie had a dream.

Someone was chasing her. She ran as fast as she could, but she came to a huge iron door, wrapped in chains and locked with a lock that had no key.

Desperately, she pounded on it. She tried to open it, but the solid iron wouldn't budge. Her hands were red and swollen as she frantically yanked at the chain. Then, from the other side of the door, she heard a voice.

*-You don't have the key.*

Jennie gasped. That voice sounded like her own.

*-You have to find the key, Jennie.*

The other Jennie commanded. She froze for a moment.

"Where is it?" Jennie asked, shocked.

*-Hurry! There's no time. Hurry, before Cerdina finds out!*

"What do you mean? What is it that she can't find out?"

But there was no answer. No matter how many times she asked, the other Jennie continued,

*-If she finds out...*

The voice spoke an ominous warning.

*-She will kill him.*

With a cry, Jennie opened her eyes.

"...Ah!"

She woke from the nightmare, but it was not a relief.

Her stomach ached, and she clutched it in her hands.

"Ahh, ah..."

Curling up into a ball, she drew deep breaths, exhaling slowly. When the stabbing pain finally subsided, her whole body was drenched in cold sweat.

Looking around dizzily, she realized she was in a familiar place. Her bedroom in her palace, with the dim morning light filtering through the windows.

Lying in bed, she shivered for a moment, and then placed her hands resolutely on her belly again. Her face was rigid.

Inside her, something twisted. It was a faint movement, but it was real. Then it disappeared as if it had never happened.

*What was that?*

A shiver ran through her. For a while, she was paralyzed, but she gathered herself and rose from the bed. Too much was happening too fast.

At first, she thought of calling a doctor, but something in her mind immediately protested. She shouldn't do that. And she couldn't help thinking of another man, the first man who sprang to her mind when she wondered who she could talk to about what was happening to her body.

The events of the previous night whirled through her mind. Baroness Cinael. That bill of sale for a small farm. Many moments that had not been at all unpleasant. The places where that man had bit and sucked were still hot, tingling with sensations she couldn't erase. All of it reminded her of last night.

She lifted her hands to her cheeks. She had done something unimaginable, but strangely, she didn't feel guilt or regret. Looking down at her left hand, she saw the engagement ring was back on her

finger, and closed her eyes at the urge to rip it off and fling it away.

She should be thinking of her wedding. But she couldn't control her fluttering heart.

What was it about him? Why did she feel such a strong attraction to him? It worried her, but remembering how sweet it had been to sleep in his arms made her stumble. Catching herself on a table, she poured herself a glass of water and sipped it, trying to untangle the conflicts in her mind one at a time.

First, she had to find out what was happening to her body. It would be best to find Liam first, and ask him to get a doctor they could trust. She also had questions about some of the things that had happened the other day.

She was sure that something was terribly wrong, but she didn't have enough information to come to any conclusion.

Jennie bit her lip. She had been trying to calm the chaos in her mind, but suddenly the room felt stifling. She couldn't stand it, she wanted to run, so badly that she grabbed the doorknob to fly out into the garden.

".....!"

It didn't open.

Desperately, she yanked at the door, panicking.

"Princess!"

Countess Melissa's voice came from the other side of the door, and Jennie had never been so glad to hear it.

"Countess! Please open the door!"

But the answer was disturbing.

"I'm sorry. I can't."

"...What?"

"His Majesty has ordered that you shall remain locked in your room, starting today," the Countess said seriously. "You will not be allowed to leave."

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Lady Mirael hummed happily as she lifted the new gown she would wear. Standing before a mirror, currently only an expensive necklace and earrings adorned her naked body. She was proud of her voluptuous figure and struck several poses in the mirror, thinking of Cerdina. Though she had made some mistakes in her efforts to do her best, Cerdina had always affectionately comforted her.

"After all, the Queen Mother is on my side."

It was Cerdina that had called Mirael to the palace. She had even met with her personally and ordered Mirael to give herself to His Majesty with all her heart. And her efforts had been rewarded. Only Lady Mirael had kept her place at Jongin's side, though he replaced his other consorts almost every day.

But as a result, she had become greedy.

Looking in the mirror, Lady Mirael admired her own sexual charms, especially compared to the skinny body of Princess Jennie. That woman looked as if she would blow over with the breeze. There was no way that body could handle pregnancy and childbirth. Morning sickness alone would make her collapse.

Mirael wanted to take the place of the Queen. But if she couldn't, if she could only have the Crown Prince in her belly...her life would change completely.

But as she remembered how the princess had insulted her, Mirael frowned. Princess Jennie hadn't liked her from the first moment they met. She was always so rude when she watched Jongin having sex with Mirael, as if it were something disgusting. But Jongin was always considerate of the princess, so Mirael had done nothing to correct that behavior.

She knew how to handle those bitches. After they had been properly chastised, they were tame and obedient.

Smiling, Lady Mirael slipped into her dress. Behind her, a man stealthily approached and grabbed her bottom, smiling mischievously at her surprise. At first, she was sulky, but smiled as soon as he did.

He was a knight that worked in the princess's palace. Initially Lady Mirael had established the relationship just because she believed it was necessary, but she was actually taking advantage of the benefits.

"What are you going to do tonight?" she asked him, smiling.

"Oh, I want to spend time with you..." He shook his head regretfully. "But not tonight. We're all on standby while the princess is confined."

"Confined?" She asked in surprise.

"Yes, she is being taken to a villa outside the palace."

"They'll probably bring her back before the wedding. I'll be going there today."

The knight eyed her cautiously as he spoke. He seemed to be concerned that this might upset her, but her mind was on other things.

"In the villa, security will be weaker than in the palace, right?" she asked, after some thought.

"I suppose."

"Hmm...I see." Lady Mirael smiled meaningfully.

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Jennie knew Jongin was mentally unstable. But she never thought he would do anything like this.

A little while after she had been imprisoned, Jongin came to her palace.

She thought she could have a sensible conversation with him. She hoped that there would be some explanation that would resolve the strange situation.

But those small hopes were cruelly crushed.

"Follow me."

As soon as he arrived, Jongin grabbed her wrist, making her stagger as he dragged her toward the door.

"Your Majesty! Your Majesty...!" She cried repeatedly, but Jongin ignored her. Her eyes widened as he dragged her out of the palace. A carriage was waiting outside.

"I have bought a villa, so you will stay in that place until the wedding," he said as he hauled her toward the carriage. "I bought it in a hurry and no remodeling has been done, so it may have some shortcomings..."

"Your Majesty!" Finally, she was able to break loose and push him away. Her body stiffened as soon as their eyes made contact. His blue gaze was filled with madness.

"You love me, Jennie." He pressed her shoulders in his hands. "You have to do what I tell you."

He was gasping. Jennie looked up at him.

"Doesn't His Majesty love me too?" She asked.

"Why do you always make me do things I don't like? I don't understand..."

Suddenly, a smile appeared on his expressionless face. It made Jennie very uncomfortable.

"Jennie."

Affectionately, Jongin tucked her hair behind her ear, and Jennie unconsciously held her breath for a moment. For an instant, she saw



Cerdina in this man. Fear went through her as if he were not the man she loved, but someone who would hurt her.

"After the wedding you can do whatever you want, so listen to me until then," Jongin whispered, kissing the back of her hand. "I'll visit you often."

He pushed her into the carriage. The door closed and the wheels turned immediately. After a long time, the carriage arrived in a peach orchard on the outskirts of the capital. In the middle of the orchard, there was a small, cozy house.

The vast orchard gave the impression of a labyrinth, so someone who didn't know the way would not be able to easily enter or leave. It looked like the sort of place a nobleman with nothing better to do would build to confine his mistress. Now Jennie was locked in this place, like a bird in a cage.

She couldn't believe this. Standing alone in the unfamiliar bedroom, Jennie smiled dejectedly. Now who would handle all the affairs of state, and the myriad tasks involved with the wedding? Even if she could have worked from this place, it certainly couldn't compare to the convenience of working from her own office in her own palace.

*'How could anyone behave this way for no reason!'*

Pulling off her engagement ring, she tossed it on the bed. Her lips pursed as she paced around the room.

Maybe he had noticed the changes in her. In the past, she had clung to him with all her might. No matter what happened, she had tried to please him, and blamed herself when he got angry. She had laughed and cried at his every word, every gesture, every action. All she had been able to think about was pleasing him.

But not now. Now, there was someone else she thought about more than Jongin. As soon as she had been locked in this the first thing she had thought of was that man...

Jennie stopped. And then she asked herself a question.

*What do I want to do?*

Maybe she already knew the answer, but some level of her consciousness avoided it. The elusive truth slipped through her fingers.

At a crossroads, she looked at the engagement ring lying on the bed. After long deliberation, she slipped it back onto her finger.

Once her anger passed, she came back to her senses. Jongin was a powder keg right now and might explode at any moment, but that meant she should remain calm and not disobey his orders.

But soon, she came across another big problem. Life in the orchard wasn't so bad, even though her freedom had been completely taken from her. At least the orchard was filled with fresh vegetation, unlike the palace. Even the air felt cleaner.

The problem was Cerdina's tea.

After she had eaten the Kurkan food, Jennie's stomach had felt so much better, she didn't feel much discomfort in eating, if she ate in small amounts. But every time she drank the tea, her stomach ache got worse. With the ladies-in-waiting watching her every move, it was difficult to drink it and then vomit it up, as she had in the palace. So she had no choice but to ingest it every day. But after suffering from severe stomach aches, she had to take some risks.

After a few days of observation, she had learned how a few ladies-in-waiting and fifty knights were guarding the orchard villa. At first glance, their security seemed airtight, but she found several significant flaws.

Jongin never paid attention to such matters, so he probably hadn't noticed. If he had, he would have increased security even if he'd had to hire mercenaries.

After she had a clear understanding of the security measure, Jennie plucked up her courage. In the middle of the night, when her ladies were sleeping, she secretly slipped out of bed. Taking out a small piece of paper and quill, she wrote a note by moonlight.

*-I know you are watching me.-*

Only a few words should be needed. She only wrote one more sentence.

*-Please help me.-*

Placing the note on the windowsill, she weighted it down with one of her jewels to keep the wind from blowing it away. For a long time, she stood and looked up at the glowing moon in the sky, and then finally closed the window.

The next morning, when she looked at the windowsill, the note had disappeared.

Jennie's day began as it always had in the palace.

She got up early in the morning and went to work in the office of the villa, addressing some of the most urgent tasks. The fact that she was not at the palace limited her scope. When the time came, she ate under the watchful eyes of her ladies-in-waiting, and dutifully drank the tea Cerdina had sent. It felt as if she was swallowing poison with every sip, but she endured it, determined.

She watched the sun set. It tinted the orchard red until it disappeared into the mountains to the west, and then darkness overwhelmed the whole villa.

Unlike the palace, which was illuminated by lanterns even late at night, the orchard was shrouded in silent shadows.

As soon as the sun went down, Jennie kept an eye on the window. The man she was waiting for always appeared when she least expected him.

She wondered if he would come in by the window this time too, or maybe some other way. She didn't feel bored, waiting for him. It was entertaining to imagine what his arrival would be like. Deliberately, she left the window unlatched, fearing to obstruct his entrance.

Alone in the bedroom, she longed for the night like a child awaiting a gift. She couldn't control her excitement. She tried reading a book, but her eyes kept wandering to the window. When she couldn't take it anymore, she went to the window and looked for a long time into

the dark.

She was reading by the light of a small oil lamp when she felt a shiver suddenly run down her back. Jennie set the book down.

Lifting the lamp from the desk, she approached the door, her shadow stretching far into the far behind her. It was quiet outside. She couldn't hear anything, not even the footsteps of her ladies or the murmur of the knights. It seemed as if everyone had gone to sleep.

Suddenly she had a bad feeling, an instinctive fear.

She wanted to go check, but when she turned the doorknob, it was locked. Her ladies locked her into her room every night to keep her from leaving. As she was standing before the door, she heard voices.

*-Look for her.*

*-She must be on the second floor.*

Startled, she turned. Those weren't the voices of her ladies or the knights. Quickly, she went to her desk and set the lamp down, grabbing a sharp, slender letter opener. Looking quickly around the room, she saw only a few places to hide: under the bed, in the closet, or under her desk. She would be found quickly.

There was no one to call for help. She would have to protect herself. Nervously, she opened the window.

Beneath the window was a thin ledge, barely wide enough for her toes. But if she held onto the window frame, she could stay there for a long time. With the slender knife in her mouth, she set her foot on the window sill.

Golden eyes stared into hers from the darkness.

After a moment, she slowly took the knife from her mouth and set it on the window sill.

Liam stretched out his arms to her without a word.

He would catch her if she jumped. How strange that she trusted this man so much.

It was a long distance from the second floor bedroom to the ground, but she felt no fear. She had no doubt that he would catch her. Jennie leapt from the window sill, her silver hair fluttering behind her, and Liam's arms went around her nimbly, at precisely the right moment.

Her breath was unsteady and she opened her mouth to begin to tell him that they should go, that there were strangers in the house, but she couldn't say it.

She was frightened, but his golden eyes were utterly calm. It would be absurd to tell this man to run. The idea of fleeing was anathema to him. Jennie pressed her lips together.

"You surprise me in so many ways," Liam said, lifting an eyebrow.

Through the open window, she could hear the sound of her bedroom door being broken down. A moment later, there were shouts and curses from many male voices. Holding her in his arms, he looked down at her, shining in the moonlight.

"I have come to help you."

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## Chapter 142

### Chapter 142 - Far Away

It was the first time she had been outside at night since she had come to the villa. Under the moonlight, the peach orchard was quiet, unripe green fruits hanging from the trees, adding their round shadows to the branches and leaves. Liam bent his head toward hers.

"I'm very motivated right now," he murmured, and smiled, her reflection glowing in his eyes. "When someone asks for help, it makes you want to do your best, right?"

She could imagine him reading her note with that same small smile.

"There she is!"

"She was supposed to be locked up! Who the hell is that?"

The intruders who had broken down the door peered out of the window at Liam and Jennie, and no doubt more of them were coming back down the stairs. But Jennie paid them no attention. The man in front of her captivated her, and to Liam, there was no one else. They gazed at each other as if they were the only people in the world.

There were so many questions she had to ask them. If she had tried to count them, she would have run out of fingers and toes. But when she opened her mouth, what came out was utter nonsense.

"All the time I think about you," she whispered, reaching to cup his cheek in her hand, this man who looked as if he were made of every solid thing in the world. "Morning and night..." She hesitated and confessed, "and all day, every day..."

"Me too," he said after a moment. His golden eyes were brighter than the moonlight. "I think about you all day long."

Jennie closed her eyes. Her heart and mind were not in alignment. She wavered, standing at the junction where two paths lay before her, beckoning her forward. But from the moment she'd decided to write the note, or perhaps even before...the balance had tipped

toward her heart.

Her fingertips brushed his face. She stroked his forehead, his eyebrows, his sharp nose, his well-defined lips, even his firm chin. And he allowed it, closing his eyes as she touched his face, like a beast being caressed by his master. As he submitted to her touch, she suddenly thought:

*I don't know. I think I like this man.*

It was embarrassing to come to that conclusion, but from the moment she met him, he had so quickly conquered her heart. The love she had built all her life had shattered, and she had to accept this new love that she had met only a few days ago.

It was madness. A torrent of criticism swept through her mind, demanding that she think of Jongin, reminding her how much she loved him, but that was nothing compared to the river of emotion that surged through her for this man. It rushed through her, surged past its banks, and overflowed.

*I would like him to be my husband.*

She was so enchanted with this man, she even let him fool her with such a ridiculous lie. But she forgot all of that, listening only to the voice in her heart.

"I want to kiss you," she whispered.

"Anything you want."

Liam tilted his head for her, and she kissed him, holding his face in both hands. Her eyelashes trembled at the pleasure of his kiss. She felt so happy being with him. Their tongues intertwined as they sucked at each other's lips, and Jennie moaned, intoxicated.

"Hmm, ahh..."

When the sound escaped her, she belatedly remembered their pursuers and tried to look back, but Liam immediately caught her chin.

"Don't look away, Jennie," he said, and kissed her again, his tongue delving deep. Jennie shuddered at the caress of tongues, and their lips parted with a soft, wet sound. Her eyes met his, filled with passion, and he kissed her all over her face.

"Li..." The name came out weakly, and his eyes filled with satisfaction, the pupils of his golden eyes dilating. And she made a decision.

She was not doing what she should. She knew what was wrong. But as she wavered between the two paths before her, Jennie, Princess of Estia, chose the wrong one. She would leave everything behind.

"I...I want to go far away."

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## Chapter 143

### Chapter 143 - Suspense

She felt as if she had jumped from a cliff. She didn't even know how long the fall would be. Maybe it would be an abyss with no bottom. But she wasn't afraid. She knew this man would catch her.

It was a completely illogical choice, but she had no regrets. Her love for Jongin had burned to ashes in the fire consuming her heart, and though it was still trying to hold onto her, she knew that she would be able to get rid of all of it, in time.

*I love this man.*

She didn't understand why. She was so attracted to him, it was almost upsetting. She was already in his arms, and she still wanted to be closer.

Liam was silent. He seemed almost paralyzed by the request, and she stroked his cheek, pleading.

"Will you take me with you?"

This man considered her his wife. If all the affection he had shown her so far was true, then it should not be such an unreasonable request. But for a long time, Liam said nothing, and finally he set her down and lifted up her hand to the level of her face.

Jennie bit her lip nervously. What if this had all just been some deception that she had been stupid enough to believe? But suddenly her eyes fixed on the ring on her finger, gleaming subtly in the dark, and she pulled her hand away.

Even with that ring on her finger, she wanted to flee with this man. If she had been in Liam's position, she wouldn't have believed her, either. Hadn't she told him over and over how much she loved Jongin?

Even though she had made her decisions after long thought, her words probably seemed empty, from Liam's perspective. Just as she

doubted him, so he must doubt her.

And she couldn't explain or justify herself. There was no logical reason behind what she was doing. Her excitement bled away, and Jennie lowered her head. If he refused her, there was nothing she could do.

After a small eternity, Liam finally spoke.

"Jennie..."

She had been staring at her feet as if awaiting the pronouncement of her death sentence. Slowly, she lifted her head.

"...I'll do anything you want." His eyes were filled with affection, and he took her left hand and lifted it to his lips. "You want to run? Then we'll just run."

Determinedly, he kissed her ring finger. He kissed the ring. Then he wrapped his other hand around her waist.

"I don't care if you love someone else. I don't care if you say you love that guy for the rest of your life..." His voice was filled with suffering. "I just can't see you like this anymore, Jennie..."

The impact of his emotions was so strong, it shook her heart. Automatically she reached out to him, wanted to comfort him, to hug him for showing her his hurt. But just as she was about to embrace him, a sharp pain stabbed through her belly.

"OW...!"

Gasping, she clutched her belly. She felt this pain every night, but this was different. It felt as if something was slicing at her insides with a knife.

"Jennie!" Liam grabbed her as she staggered, trying and failing to recover. She wanted to say she was all right, but the pain was so intense she couldn't speak.

Suddenly, she felt something push out from inside her, slipping between her thighs and running down her ankles. When she looked

down, it was red.

It can't be...

There was a wave of desperation, and then nothing.

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Her eyes gleamed. Nimbly, she scrambled up into a tree as she pursued her fleeing prey. Leaping through the branches, she advanced, passing overhead and leaping to land right in front of her panicking victim. He screamed in terror.

"Ahh...!"

Mura grinned, baring her teeth. One leg shot out, hammering into the target with the wet thud like a watermelon being smashed.

Kurkans found it more natural to attack directly with hands and feet, rather than using weapons. When there were many people watching, they would use swords and bows, but if there were no witnesses, they revealed their true nature.

Mura was indulging her Kurkan self fully. Standing over the corpse with its pulped head, she looked back proudly.

"Did you see that, Haban?"

"Yes! It was perfect!"

Haban, who had snapped another man's neck, approached with his hands stained with blood. Mura extended her foot toward him, and Haban braced it on his knee as he bent to retie the laces of her shoes.

"It's so much more fun to cook with you," she said, shrugging.

"I think so too, Mura."

She smiled at the quick response. With her shoes retied, she turned to walk, with Haban following behind her.

All of the Kurkans had been in an uproar after they learned they

would be meeting Jennie again. Mura had begged Liam to let her come, and he had chosen her after she promised she would make the most delicious food.

Their Queen looked as if she had not been eating properly. She had lost a lot of weight. Knowing how much she loved Kurkan food, Mura had packed several full meals, and hurried to the chosen place with her arms laden and Haban behind her, carrying still more items in a sack. But the excited Mura had been greeted with the sight of suspicious-looking men in hoods.

The villa in the orchard had been silent. The knights and ladies-in-waiting were sleeping. The sight of those hooded men slipping inside angered her to her core. Her Queen would eat cold food because of these men.

So while Liam was headed for Jennie, Mura went to clear the area with Haban and Genin, displaying her abilities for the first time in a long time. She snapped off the intruders' heads like watermelons off a vine.

"Where's Genin?"

"Decided to clean up the other side...she's probably done by now."

At that moment, Genin was approaching, walking toward them in the distance while smoking a cigar.

She had finished her task.

When Mura glanced back at Haban, he had already lit a similar cigar for her, and she kissed his cheek as she took it.

"Thank you."

Haban's face turned red. Leaving the embarrassed man alone, Mura went to meet Genin.

"Are you finished, Genin?"

"I killed them all."

Mura smiled coldly at the answer. The intruders had gone into the house knowing that there were knights on guard. Obviously someone had ordered it, and had been careful to render all the ladies-in-waiting and knights unconscious. It was likely that they had not been planning to kill Jennie.

In Estia, a bride's purity was as important as their life. Most likely, the hooded men had been planning to rape her, or do some other degrading thing. Few things would be worse than simply taking her virginity. That alone would have created a cruel nightmare for her that would never end.

Jennie would have endangered herself if she even admitted that it happened. She was the Princess of Estia and soon to be married; given her status and the circumstances, she would likely have chosen silence over scandal. She might even have found herself in a position where she had to cover up for her virginity with her own hands.

It was a despicable plan. Mura didn't know who was behind it, but she wouldn't let them get away unscathed.

"Whoever did this will pay...!" She said, scowling. It was hard to control the angry madness inside her. It took all her patience to endure it and calm down.

Exhaling her smoke, Mura nervously tapped her foot on the ground.

"We will catch the one responsible, I promise," Haban reassured her, coming to stand at her side.

The sight of the couple made Genin wonder if she had treated her own husband with such support. She really should be better to him.

All together, Haban, Mura, and Genin suddenly turned their heads.

They froze, looking at the same distant place, and then suddenly broke into a run at the same time.

Their speed would have terrified any normal human, but they raced toward Liam, who was holding Jennie in his arms.

His head turned toward them slowly. His golden eyes shook and he looked as if he might collapse any moment.

"Morga..." His voice trembled. "Morga..."

Immediately, Haban ran for the sorcerer, and Mura and Genin hurried over to Liam.

Jennie was lying unconscious in his arms, looking thinner and weaker than ever, so white that it seemed she might vanish any second. Looking at her with horror, Mura let out a cry.

Jennie's skirt soaked with blood.

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## Chapter 144

### Chapter 144 - Pregnant

As soon as he found Morga, Haban threw the sorcerer over one shoulder and tore off again at incredible speed, without even pausing for an explanation. Even though he was being abducted in the middle of the night, Morga offered no resistance.

The expression on Haban's face was explanation enough.

In the moonlit villa in the peach orchard, everyone was still sleeping. Haban darted up the stairs and through the corridors to drop Morga off in front of the door. And then he stopped, gripping the doorknob.

Haban was afraid.

Slowly, he opened the door, revealing a room dimly lit by moonlight and oil lamps. All was silent, and Jennie lay in the center of the stifling space. Her face was pale and it looked as if she wasn't even breathing, her body lying as still as a doll's. Liam sat beside her, gripping her hands as if he feared she would leave him if he let go.

Slowly, he turned his eyes toward Morga. The bright gold had dimmed.

"She...has bled..." The king said brokenly.

Morga's heart skipped a beat. Walking over to the bed, he bent to examine Jennie. She had a pulse, though it was weak.

But there was something strange. Morga took out a potion and drank it down, then performed a simple spell to heighten his senses. His eyes flickered as he continued his examination.

He wasn't sure how he should explain. It was going to be a difficult conversation.

"She seems to have bled due to an abortifacient," he began. Haban's, Genin's and Mura's eyes grew wide.

"In, in that case...she was pregnant..." Mura began desperately.

Silently, Morga nodded, and all the Kurkans froze.

"Fortunately, Jennie and the baby are safe," he added immediately.

No one rejoiced. Only heavy silence followed until Mura turned away, covering her mouth with her hand, and Haban held as she cried, closing his eyes. Genin only nodded.

"It is a miracle," Morga concluded. The abortifacient would have been fatal to any normal baby, even a Kurkan baby. Only Liam's baby could have survived.

"But we can't hope for more miracles. We have to do something else now."

Jennie was in serious condition. She had not been sleeping or eating well, and she had been ingesting that abortifacient for who knew how long. It was incredible that her body had endured for so long.

She must have survived from sheer will.

"It seems that she has been fighting hard," Morga went on. "She probably doesn't realize it, but maybe she has been instinctively trying to protect her baby. I think..." Morga tried to speak calmly. "I think it would be best to keep it a secret from her."

She didn't remember anything from the past.

Sudden news that she was pregnant would be a terrible shock, and she was already so weak. It would risk her body and the baby in her womb. It was even possible that Jennie, who was still wrapped in so many spells, might tell Cerdina about her pregnancy.

In any case, the wedding was coming soon. They could keep the secret until then and tell her the truth once she had returned to the desert. Morga calculated the dates. Unlike the nine month gestation of human babies, Kurkan babies were born after eight months.

Fortunately, it seemed possible for this infant to reach the stabilization stage.



"I'll prepare an antidote first," Morga said. Liam did not reply. Morga hesitated, lips pursed, and then gestured to Mura. She took the hint.

"I will prepare other meals that the Queen can eat when she wakes up," she said quickly. "Light meals."

Gently, she tugged Haban's arm, and he nudged Genin.

"We'll leave...for the time being," she added, hesitating. Liam still had not replied. He just sat, gazing at Jennie. Even after all the other Kurkans had closed the door and disappeared, he remained where he was with his eyes on his queen, unmoving.

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Jennie stood before a familiar immense iron door. The heavy chain and lock were still in place. The iron door was locked tight. How was she supposed to open it?

Even if she could find the key and open the lock, she didn't know how she could remove that chain, or how she could move that huge iron door. Her body was so frail, the task seemed impossible.

As she studied the door, she heard a voice from inside.

*-You're doing fine, Jennie*

Jennie placed her hand on the door and felt a peculiar, cold sensation under the palm of her hand. Was she really doing fine? Could she do this?

*-You can do it.*

The answer was full of conviction. Jennie blinked.

Even though the voice was hers, it felt completely different, somehow. It felt as bright as the sun.

Why did their voices sound so different? That other voice laughed softly, as if it had heard her thoughts.

*-I understand. You always have doubts. You question everything.*

When she heard those words, a person appeared in her mind's eye. As soon as Jennie pictured him, the Jennie beyond the door spoke immediately.

*-That man is right. That man is...*

But her voice faded away. The iron door suddenly disappeared, and the empty black space transformed into a vast desert.

*The golden sand stretched out like the sea. Jennie looked around, amazed. She had never been in a place like this before. She had not expected to see the desert in her dreams.*

*Disbelieving, she began to walk, the soft sand tickling her bare feet. After walking for a little while, she saw a small pool of blood, and in the center of the pool was a little baby wolf.*

*Jennie rushed over to it. It was covered in blood and in terrible condition, with so many wounds and scars. Its little mouth was badly hurt. Its teeth were broken as if it had bitten something hard, and its claws were worn down and bleeding.*

*But it was alive.*

*There was a faint noise of its breathing, and its heart beat steadily. Jennie cradled the baby wolf in her arms and felt the urge to cry.*

*"I'm so sorry," she whispered. The strange words escaped her without understanding where they came from. "I should have protected you...but I didn't do enough...."*

*The little wolf shuddered at her words and opened its eyes, whimpering.*

*The wolf cub's eyes were bright gold.*

*Jennie jerked in surprise. Those golden eyes were like the soul of the sun and sand, and they looked like the eyes of a man. The moment her fingers gently traced beneath those eyes, she heard a scraping, metallic noise.*

*.....!*

*Her eyes widened. Black chains were converging on her from all sides,*

*crawling over the sand like snakes. Goosebumps rose on her arms and her breath stopped. It was terrifying, but she knew instinctively that she had to hide the baby wolf. If they stayed together, they would both end up in chains.*

*Standing, she looked around, but there was nothing but sand. Nowhere to hide the baby wolf, and it was so badly hurt already. It might die if it was harmed again.*

*At that thought, her fear disappeared, and she steeled herself.*

*Lifting the wolf cub over her head, she watched the chains approach. When they reached her feet, she couldn't help screaming, high and blood chilling.*

*"No! No!!!"*

*She kicked at the chains with all her might as they tried to attach themselves to her body.*

*"Don't touch it!"*

*The hard iron closed around her body, tearing her soft skin. Her blood flowed like water, but she didn't even feel the pain. All she could think was that somehow she had to protect the baby wolf.*

*But she wasn't strong enough. For all her desperate efforts, the chains wrapped around her body.*

*The wolf cub howled, its golden eyes glowing with ferocity. Wiggling free, it slipped from her hands and attacked the chains. With its broken teeth, it bit them, savaging with its worn claws.*

*The chains drew back, recoiling at the little wolf's fury. The wolf snarled menacingly as the chains slowly retreated.*

*"Stop!" Jennie's voice trembled. "You are badly hurt..."*

*Blood was already flowing from fresh wounds and torn scans. Ripping pieces of cloth from her clothing, Jennie bent to bandage the wolf cub's wounds. And as the rough bandages quickly reddened with blood, she finally began to cry. Then she heard a new voice.*

*"It's all right." The little wolf stared up at her with its golden eyes. "I will protect you."*

Jennie woke up.

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## Chapter 145

### Chapter 145 - Little Wolf

That little wolf was much stronger than she had expected. As badly wounded as it was, it had fought so valiantly to protect her, and that thought distressed her.

She should have protected it. She should have done something.

It had broken her heart to watch the baby wolf fighting against those chains, its small body streaming blood, fighting with its broken teeth and torn claws. If it had been possible, she would have gone back to that place. She didn't want to leave the little wolf alone.

But she could not go back.

Jennie came back to reality with a jolt.

Slowly, her eyes opened. She could feel tears sliding down her cheeks. The emotions of her dream had followed her. She blinked as her tears tapered off, and when her vision cleared, she found herself looking up into golden eyes.

Bright golden eyes the color of sand and sun. Eyes that were just the same as the eyes of the baby wolf in her dream.

Liam lay on his side beside her with his arms wrapped around her. It seemed as if he had been in that position for a long time. Even when he saw her awaken, he said nothing. His eyes were fixed on her, unblinking, and in an increasingly awkward silence, Jennie gently looked away.

The room was dark. It looked like a bedroom, but she couldn't even tell if it was day or night; every window was covered with thick curtains.

Suddenly, there was a soft kiss on her forehead.

Liam stroked her hair, and then lifted her hand to tenderly kiss each finger. It sent such a tingle through her, it took a moment to realize

that there was nothing on her ring finger. The engagement ring was gone.

She didn't ask where. For now she would forget all of it: the suspicious intruders, the knights that imprisoned her in the villa, her ladies-in-waiting, and everything else. She would think only of the man in front of her.

A little awkwardly, she moved to embrace him. She had wanted to hug him earlier, but she had fainted.

And after a moment, Liam sighed and hugged her back. Jennie buried her face in his broad chest.

She wanted to trust this man. And she also wanted to protect him. It would have sounded ridiculous to anyone who knew what she was thinking, and Jennie was well aware of her limitations; there was very little she could do for the King of another land, another race, from a place far across the desert.

If only she were as strong as a Kurkan. She was so weak. So frail. So useless.

And if she were stronger, she could have protected the baby wolf. That little golden-eyed cub.

"I had a dream..." She said slowly.

"What dream?" Liam asked. It felt as if it were the first time he had ever spoken. Listening to his voice, she felt as if she were still in a dream.

"It was a very strange dream...there was a little wolf..." His eyes narrowed at the words, and Jennie gazed at his golden eyes, murmuring, "Its eyes were the same as yours..."

"....."

Jennie gently ran a fingertip around the orbits of his eyes. They were exactly the same as the cub's. And now that she thought of it, this man even looked a little bit like a wolf. Imagining Liam with wolf ears made her laugh inside. Where would he hide them?

"What color was its fur?" Liam asked.

"Silver," she said, searching her memory. Even though the little wolf had been covered in blood, she had been able to tell the color of its fur. "Silver colored."

"Silver fur?"

Jennie hesitated a moment.

"The little wolf protected me," she admitted, and told him how brave the baby wolf had been, in her dream. How even with its tiny body covered in blood, it had tried to fight the terrible chains that bound her.

How she had tried with all her might to fight the chains herself. And failed.

As she told the story, Liam was silent.

"I don't like that I left the little wolf alone," she said as she finished the tale. "I'm so worried..."

Thinking of how she had abandoned the baby wolf made her want to cry. She didn't understand why she was crying so much lately. Her emotions had been so intense, and so hard to control. Wrinkling the bridge of her nose, she blinked the tears back.

"I don't think you should worry," Liam said.

"But it was so small, and it had so many injuries!"

"It won't die easily." He said with complete confidence, and laid his hand on her belly.

"Especially if it is protecting you."

There wasn't the slightest doubt in his voice, and Jennie looked at him questioningly.

"It has my blood in it, obviously it will protect you."

".....?"

The more he explained things, the more confused she became. Jennie tried to puzzle out this riddle in her mind.

"Can you...become a wolf?"

"You asked me that before." He smiled and stroked her cheek tenderly. "But I can't do it."

She was about to say that she had never wondered such a ridiculous thing, but held her tongue. It was obvious that there was something wrong with her memory, and she decided to trust his words. It had only been a dream, and a dream that made no sense, but it had shaken her so much it was hard to focus on anything else.

Sharing it with Liam did make her feel better, as if a weight had been lifted from her shoulders. And he had listened so seriously, and even assured her that the baby wolf would be fine. It was as if he would listen to even the least of the thoughts that troubled her. He made her feel that even if her mind was troubled, and her thoughts cast upon the open sea, he would safely bring her back home.

"Thank you for coming to help me," she said belatedly. She couldn't imagine what would have happened, if it hadn't been for him. But he shook his head.

"I'm the one who should thank you," he whispered, rubbing his face in her neck. "You've endured all this alone. It must have been very hard..."

His voice was filled with regret, but she couldn't imagine what he was sorry for. Gently, she patted his back, and her hands were so very small, compared to that broad back. It was some time before he spoke again.

"Thank you for enduring so far," he said softly.

It was so strange, how with those simple words, all the darkness in her mind disappeared. Jennie blinked, recalling something that had been troubling her, before.



"Has...the doctor come?"

"Yes. He already examined you."

"What did he say?" She had asked for help in the first place because of that excruciating pain in her belly. "I have been having pain lately, in my stomach..."

"...Lately?"

"Yes, ever since I had to drink the tea she gave me..."

Liam's eyes turned cold.

"The Queen must have given it to you," he said, with such murderous intent, he couldn't hide it, even in front of Jennie. It frightened her so badly, it was a moment before she could speak.

"Yes...yes, it was...the Queen Mother..."

"I hope she's prepared for the consequences," he said icily, and then glanced at her, as if he had only just realized that he was scaring her. Instantly, he calmed. "It's all right, Jennie. You don't have to drink it anymore."

For a moment, he caressed her reassuringly.

"What about the intruders?" He asked. "Is there anyone you suspect?"

Jennie thought about it. There were several nobles she had clashed with, but none of them would dare do something like that. As she mentally widened her search, there was only one person who could be responsible.

Lady Mirael.

The last time they had spoken, Jennie had saved her from Jongin's fury. But Lady Mirael wasn't even grateful for it.

Jennie would not be merciful again. She had no intention of offering compassion to an ungrateful person. And considering the cruelty of the thing Lady Mirael had planned to do to her...

"I think it was Lady Mirael," she said bluntly, deciding to retaliate. Briefly, she explained that Lady Mirael was Jongin's consort, and hated Jennie.

Liam listened silently.

"Ahh. Lady Mirael," he said, repeating the name, and smiled.

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## Chapter 146

### Chapter 146 - Warning

The tone of his voice was so terrifying, Jennie shuddered. But slowly that cold, murderous air subsided, and it was only when he was composed again that he noticed her distress.

"Are you in pain?" He asked, startled. His gentle voice had no trace of that ferocity in it.

"It's a little cold," she said, making up an excuse rather than the truth. Liam slipped off his tunic and drew her against his warm body, giving her his body heat and tugging a blanket over her.

Now she certainly couldn't claim to be cold; it was hot enough that she began to perspire. But she liked being wrapped in his arms, so she only nestled against him as they talked quietly together, content in each other's arms. They didn't speak of the future.

It was enough to be together, and talk of small things.

Listening to his voice, she began to feel sleepy again, and soon Jennie drifted off in the middle of their conversation.

And so she didn't see it, when those kind golden eyes hardened with fury.

\*\*\*

Jennie slept for a long time and only woke when the sun was beginning to set. A full day had passed since she had fallen asleep. It took a moment to realize she was still in the villa in the peach orchard.

The atmosphere of the house had completely changed.

Before, it had smelled faintly musty, but now the room was filled with a pleasant scent. The heavy curtains had been pulled open to allow the evening light to stream through the windows, dispelling the

omnipresent gloom. On the table was a gold censor, burning some fresh, sweet incense, and Jennie's lay in the bed breathing it for a while before she rose.

As soon as she stirred, the door opened. Jennie was surprised to see a strange Kurkan enter. She had expected one of her usual maids.

"You finally woke up," said the Kurkan with a smile, a woman with tan skin and long hair tied up on the back of her head. "I am Mura. This is the second time I've introduced myself to you."

She must be one of the people from Jennie's lost memories. Jennie searched for her, trying to remember, but there was nothing. She was worried that Mura would be disappointed, but the Kurkan woman didn't seem to mind. She only urged Jennie to sit back in the bed and handed her a small glass.

"Drink it," she said. "Morga gave all his effort to make this potion. It will help remove the toxins from your body."

Jennie drank it, and when it was gone, Mura brought her dinner. Jennie's jaw dropped.

The trays in Mura's hands seemed like enough food for twenty people, but all of it was for Jennie. Placing a small tray in front of her, Mura began to serve the food, and jacks pulled up the blanket and then began to eat.

She had tasted Kurkan food the other day, and it had been so delicious, she had thought ever since how much she wanted more. Mura seemed delighted to watch her eat every bite, which only made it easier to eat. By the time Jennie came to her senses, she realized she had eaten three or four times as much as her usual meal.

It felt as if her stomach might burst if she had another bite. Jennie set down her silver.

"Where is Liam?" Jennie asked, trying to distract the obviously disappointed Kurkan woman.

"Well, Liam...went out with some of the others. He'll probably be back tomorrow. They were all very angry," Mura added with a smile,

and an icy fury in her own eyes. "Everyone has had to be very patient for a long time."

Jennie couldn't imagine why they would be so angry.

As she was thinking about it, Mura's eyes widened.

"Oh, I didn't bring your snacks!"

Mura darted away to fetch another tray and brought it back to Jennie. The tray was overflowing with dainty snacks.

"It's baklava," Mura explained, and showed Jennie how the treat was made with thin layers of pastry layered with crushed nuts and honey lemon syrup. It was a very sweet treat, but it went perfectly with the cup of hot tea Mura brewed for her. The Kurkan was pleased to see Jennie eating with enthusiasm.

"All you need to do is rest while you wait," she said.

Jennie looked out the window as she drank her tea, watching the sky steadily darken. It looked as if it was going to be a long night.

Sorcerers believed they could gain spiritual power by eating a heart.

Morga disliked this method. Eating an animal's heart made him sick to his stomach, and spells cast this way were filled with negative spiritual power.

But even the Tomari could gain power this way, and he had no choice. There was no other way to quickly cast a powerful spell.

Morga looked down at the dish before him with abhorrence. The red heart of a black cow was on the dish, seasoned as he had requested with various spices. But no matter how many spices were used, it was still the heart of a cow. It couldn't even be cooked. It had to be eaten raw.

After looking at it for a long time, Morga picked up a knife and fork. He couldn't just bite into the thing, so he cut it apart and tried to distract himself as he chewed the pieces, one bite at a time.

Two miracles had occurred. The first was the conception of a baby in a body that should have been infertile. The second was the survival of that baby after repeated and prolonged use of abortifacients.

No further miracles should be expected. Morga knew that there could be no mistakes. He had to do everything within his power.

Once the cow's heart was gone, he let out a deep sigh and went to sit inside the magic pattern he had already drawn, facing forward.

Before him sat dozens of Kurkans.

In the darkness, their eyes glowed, eager to finally begin. They were terrifying.

Black smoke billowed as he poured his spiritual power into the magic pattern. The smoke rolled outward toward the Kurkans and sank into their bodies. Morga wiped the corners of his bloodstained mouth with a handkerchief before he spoke.

"It will work until the morning sun rises."

Genin, positioned at the front of the Kurkans, nodded.

"That's enough."

The spell would hide the Kurkans from the eyes of the Queen. Once they were sure the preparations were complete, Haban went to find Liam.

"Liam!"

Their King was leaning against a wall and smoking a cigar, but his eyes glowed bright gold in spite of the tobacco. He did not need to speak. No commands were needed. When the time was right, he nodded and tossed away the last of his cigarettes.

The Kurkans knew what their King wanted.

Inhuman beings began to move in the darkness of the night.

\*\*\*

In a luxurious manor in the most expensive quarter of the capital of Estia, the new owner stretched out in bed, smiling drunkenly.

She had bought the mansion with a bribe she had received for being the King's consort, and until now she had been at another mansion, drinking with the nobles there. There had been a lot of drinking, but it wasn't enough. As soon as she got home, she had another bottle of alcohol by herself.

She was in the mood to celebrate. Lady Mirael laughed wildly.

"That woman was so dignified. Let's see her act composed after those bastards are through with her."

It was exciting to imagine Princess Jennie sobbing and trembling after their work was done, and even better knowing that no matter how she suffered, she could not report it. She would have to cover up her own rape.

Perhaps tomorrow Mirael would pay the princess a visit. She smiled, anticipating how she would taunt and ridicule her.

But despite these pleasant fantasies, her smile faded.

Suddenly, she felt unsettled, though she didn't understand why.

Mirael reached for a blanket and wrapped it around herself. It seemed to her that it was a little colder as she got out of bed and shook the little bell on a nearby table. Her maids hurried to her, surprised by the summons.

"Bring all the knights!!!" She shouted, and the maids rushed out in a hurry to call the knights and mercenaries she had bought to guard her mansion.

This included some of the men she had sent to the peach orchard.

Mirael's instincts were good, but not exceptional.

Anxiously, she wandered around her bedroom waiting for the knights until she came to a sudden stop.

Why is it so quiet?

She had raised the alarm. There should be commotion all over the mansion, and the building where the knights stayed was not far away. By now she should hear them coming, but it was silent.

Cautiously, Mirael cracked open the door.

"Ahhh!!!"

She recoiled in fright and fell backward, landing on her backside. The corridor was littered with the headless corpses of the knight she had summoned.

When she realized what she was seeing, she crumpled back into a faint.

Haban appeared to stuff her into a large sack, and Genin lifted her unconscious body and hauled it over her shoulder. Standing alone in the silent corridor Liam raised a lit cigar to his lips with a bloodstained hand.

"...The first," he said, and the syllables puffed out with his smoke.

\*\*\*

Cerdina could not sleep. In the deep night, she sat in her room dressed in a fine nightgown, drinking wine. As her ladies-in-waiting were asleep, she poured it herself, a clear glass filled with wine, red as blood. Usually she would drink slowly and savor the scent of the wine, but tonight, she drank it down quickly.

She wanted to get drunk, but in spite of the alcohol, her mind was clear.

Cerdina stood up and set the glass on the table.

Walking to the other side of the large room, she drew back the curtains and pushed the windows open, taking a seat on the window sill. In the quiet, serene night, she gazed on the royal palace with cold eyes.



She had Estia in the palm of her hand, but it was not enough. Her ambition did not end with one small kingdom.

Jongin's wedding would be her chance to begin expanding to other countries. She would overthrow them one by one until the whole continent was beneath her feet...so long as Jongin played his part.

But Jongin was not acting as she had expected.

*Jennie, Jennie, Jennie...*

Cerdina repeated the name nervously. If that girl were obedient, then Jongin would stay calm. The wedding would be a triumph. The barbarians might be a bit of a nuisance, but in the end they would accomplish nothing.

*I'm a god now.*

Cerdina smiled, enjoying the cool night breeze. But after a moment, she frowned.

"I don't remember inviting anyone," she sighed, and turned her head with a faint smile. "Why has the King of Kurkan come to visit me at this time of the night?"

A tall shape had appeared in the room behind her, and as the clouds cleared, the moonlight fell onto a man who had blended with the darkness like he was a shadow himself. His expressionless face was as cold as steel.

Cerdina had expected to meet him before the wedding, but this visit was a surprise. He looked the same as he had when he first visited Estia. That same arrogant gaze. Cerdina licked her lips.

"A man entering a woman's bedroom at night can only mean one thing..." Slowly, she spread her legs, and her nightgown shifted to expose her thighs. "I've never had fantasies of mating with beasts, but as you're a king, I suppose I'll try it once."

Liam said nothing. Slowly, he approached the smiling Cerdina, and all at once there was an explosion of pain in her cheek and the ringing noise of a slap.

".....!"

Her head smacked into the window frame, and the noise echoed in the silent room. Her cheek felt like it was on fire, but she didn't even have time to react before Liam raised his hand again and struck her other cheek, knocking her to the floor.

"Ahhh!!!"

Cerdina didn't have time to experience that pain before there was another one as his large hand grabbed her by the hair, lifted, and shook her hard.

Cerdina raked him with her nails, but could do nothing against his tough skin.

But after that initial terror, Cerdina got a hold of herself. She was acting as if she was a normal human being, an insect who could do nothing. But she was not. Belatedly, she remembered her power, and black smoke whirled around her, splitting into threads and rushing at Liam.

Nothing happened. The black smoke passed through his body without touching him. Her jaw dropped.

"Why...?"

Liam only gave a twisted smile. She was shocked.

She hadn't felt so helpless since she became a sorceress.

Cerdina gritted her teeth. The black smoke billowed out thickly, filling the entire room, and powerful gusts swept through, knocking objects over. But as the objects shattered and sheared through the air, there wasn't a scratch on the man.

The wind died down. The black smoke dispersed.

She could not believe it. Cerdina looked at him with trembling eyes, and he lifted her effortlessly by the hair until her feet were dangling and she cried out in pain, feeling as if her scalp might tear loose. If

she struggled, she might lose all her hair. Cerdina screamed in pain but didn't dare to move.

"Listen." The beast glared at her with golden eyes, and her mouth shut automatically. "I have left you in peace because it is necessary."

His warning was cold and clear.

"Do not anger me again."

Liam released his grip.

Cerdina crashed to the floor. Her whole body was trembling with fear, but her lips were pressed so tight together, it was as if they had been sewn shut.

"I have given your son a present."

".....!"

Cerdina's head snapped up in terror.

"Next time it won't end with a warning," Liam whispered, looking down at her. "Make no mistake, Queen Mother."

That was all. The King of Barbarians vanished as quietly as he had come, and Cerdina lay motionless for a long time, gathering herself.

Then she rose to her feet and ran from the room, dressed only in her fine nightgown.

The second she reached the corridor, she froze as rigid as a stone statue, covering her mouth with her hand. Tomaris had always roamed freely through the royal palace under her rule. They posed as servants and wreaked havoc on the order of the palace.

But now, her blood brethren were cold corpses.

Their bodies were so damaged, it looked as if they had been torn apart by a beast.

"...Jongin," she said weakly, looking at the catastrophe.

She didn't even stop for shoes. Racing barefoot through the main palace, the servants started at the sight of the elegant Queen Mother running desperately, and Cerdina waved a hand to send them scattering away, their eyes unfocused.

Crossing the long corridor, she reached Jongin's room. The foul reek of blood seeped beneath the closed door.

She was trembling as she pushed it open. It was even worse than what she had seen in her own palace. The dark room was a horror, with dozens of decapitated heads scattered across the floor. Most of them belonged to men with short hair, but the sight of long golden hair caught her attention...

The neck was so torn, it looked as if someone had ripped it from her body with their hands. Blood-soaked blonde hair fanned out over the floor, and the beautiful face was so mutilated that it was almost unrecognizable, but Cerdina knew who it was.

Lady Mirael.

The twisted expression on her mutilated face betrayed the agony of her death. Cerdina's breath came heavily as she turned to look at the foot of the bed, where Jongin was standing.

"...Mother."

Like a madwoman, she ran to him, almost stumbling over the heads of the floor to throw her arms around him and embrace her beloved son. He was unharmed. He didn't have a single scratch on him. Faint with relief, she caressed his face, but Jongin pulled away from her hand coldly.

"What have you done?"

"....."

Jongin grabbed her by the front of her nightgown.

"What the hell have you done!?"

She said nothing, and he shook her impotently.

The moon was unusually bright that night, glowing through the windows and lighting on the many heads of the dead.

\*\*\*

Jennie couldn't sleep. Her mind was too full, with too many things to think. For a long time, she tossed and turned in bed until she finally gave up.

Maybe it was because Liam was gone. When she was with him, she hadn't been thinking of the reality of her situation. Though she had decided to flee, it wasn't so easy to break her attachment to Estia.

Jennie was looking back.

What happened to the knights and the ladies-in-waiting...?

It didn't seem that they had been killed, but she had no idea what had happened to them. And even worse, Jongin had suddenly resurfaced in her mind.

While she was with Liam, she didn't care about him at all. But as soon as Liam was gone, Jongin invaded her mind.

Reason made her reproach herself for what she had done. It wasn't too late. There was still time to make amends and rectify her mistakes.

Jennie wandered the room, trying to push these intrusive thoughts from her mind.

".....!"

Suddenly, someone caught her from behind in an embrace, startling her. But the warmth she felt calmed her immediately.

"Liam." She turned around to see his golden eyes, his pupils wide and dilated. Her own eyes widened as she whispered, "...you smell like blood."

He just hugged her, as if he were pretending not to have heard her.

"Are you hurt?" She asked, pushing him back.

"Never," he said with a smile. "You're the only one who asked if I'm hurt."

There was no point in asking this man what he had been doing to come back reeking of blood. She had heard before that the nature of Kurkans was savage, like beasts. To them, it was completely normal to inflict bloody harm and take lives.

But she didn't think he would have blood on his hands for no reason. Jennie wondered who he might have killed, and why.

"Just..." Liam began slowly, and smiled mischievously. "I taught some bad people a lesson."

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## Chapter 147

### Chapter 147 - Doubts

Somehow, Jennie had the impression that if Liam set his mind to teaching bad guys a lesson, he might eradicate evil from the world. But she did not ask any further questions. He didn't seem eager to provide details.

This didn't please her, but she wasn't so curious that she would press. He was the King of Kurkan. There were probably many things he couldn't explain to her.

"What would you say to bathing together?" Liam asked, and bit the tip of her nose. "Your husband has been working hard."

Jennie started at the sting of the bite.

"Bathe?" She already felt embarrassed at the bare thought of stepping naked into a bathtub with him. She averted her eyes. "But the hot water..."

"You don't have to worry about that." Liam lifted her into his arms and headed for the bathroom. How was it possible to bathe without water?

"Mura did a good job," he said as he made his way to the marble tub, which was already filled with water.

She still felt anxious about stepping naked into the tub, but unexpectedly, she didn't have to.

Liam sat her on the edge of the tub without removing her nightgown, leaving only her feet to dangle in the water. It felt good with the warm water swirling around her calves. Beside her, Liam matter-of-factly began to remove his own clothes.

She hadn't expected him to undress so readily. Jennie didn't know where to look as he let his clothes fall on the floor, stepping entirely naked into the tub. His sculpted body was perfectly proportioned, his muscles well-defined and harmonious in motion. Her eyes

accidentally met his.

Liam sank into the tub with a slight smile, the water level rising around his large body. The tub was large enough that he didn't have to bend his knees as he immersed himself, pushing back his wet hair to bare his high forehead.

"Do you still smell blood?" He asked, sitting up and resting his arms on either side of the tub.

Jennie shook her head.

"I've been sensitive to smells lately," she said, and his eyes narrowed.

Steam filled the bathroom. Jennie began to sweat and swiped at her forehead with the back of her hand. His golden eyes lingered on her flushed cheeks, then shifted to her nightgown, which was clinging to her body in the steaming air.

Belatedly, Jennie realized how indecent she was. Her nipples were obvious, dark and protruding through the thin fabric. Of course, he had already seen her naked, but it still embarrassed her.

"What happened to my knights and la-ah!" Jennie jerked, startled as Liam's feet stretched to touch hers. This was hardly scandalous, but she was so nervous that even this surprised her. Liam chuckled as her toes curled under his feet.

"They are elsewhere for now. We'll send them back to the palace soon."

The sensation of their feet touching tickled, and suddenly Jennie felt very warm as he played with her toes. She bit her lower lip.

"Let's go back to the desert, Jennie," he said, catching one foot and lifting it to kiss it. Jennie found she was holding her breath. "We'll leave as soon as it's light."

He was smiling like a child as he said it.

"You really liked the desert from the first time you saw it."



Jennie remembered the beautiful golden sands, stretched out like a sea. Would it be as beautiful as she had dreamed? She wanted to feel that soft sand on her bare feet.

But then she had a disturbing thought. Gently, she removed her foot from his hand.

"Why didn't you take me with you from the beginning?" She asked. She had been curious about that for a long time. If she really was his wife, he ought to have taken her away the day they met.

But Liam only smiled bitterly.

"Because you are under spells."

"....."

"Spells that make you forget me...and forget everything else."

He said it quietly. But just like the smell of blood that emanated from his body after he had been delivering his lesson, he couldn't hide his distress, even though he was trying to pretend it wasn't there.

"But it doesn't matter now." He explained that due to the complicated circumstances of the spell, the best option had seemed to be for her to remain in Estia until she regained her memories. He had planned to wait. If he took her away before then, there was a chance that she would never remember him.

But now, he was willing to take that risk.

Jennie remembered what he had said, that he didn't care if she loved someone else, that even then he wanted to run away with her. She didn't understand why he was so devoted to her. Had she really married him during some period she couldn't remember?

Memories...

She thought. She remembered Baroness Cinael weeping. The lady's gown had been neat, but old-fashioned, and the sleeves had been frayed at the edges. She was not financially prosperous, and surely needed the money, but she had refused the payment Liam had

offered her.

Jennie knew how hard it was to refuse money when it was badly needed. It was proof that Baroness Cinael was truly loyal to Jennie. They must have spent a great deal of time together to have such a relationship.

But Jennie couldn't remember it. And now there was a possibility that she would lose those memories for the rest of her life. She wasn't sure that was the right decision. But she loved Liam so much, she was willing to run away with him and leave everything behind, even the title of Princess of Estia. She was definitely in love with him, beyond all reason.

Thoughts of Jongin kept popping into her head. She didn't understand why she couldn't forget him. It was as if she were tied to him with chains, she could not let him go.

Her expression sobered, and she swiped at her face to hide it, pretending to wipe away sweat. She didn't want Liam to know who she was thinking about.

"...Jennie."

Liam was very perceptive. Sighing, he pulled her into the tub. Her body sank into the warm water and her silver hair floated on the surface.

"All right," he said, sitting her on his thigh and stroking her cheek with his warm hand. "I don't care what you're thinking..."

Jennie kissed him. After a while, she drew back to whisper to this man who knew everything.

"I want to forget." Leaning in to kiss him, she whispered again. "It's very stressfu..."

The words were interrupted by Liam's sudden, deep kiss, his tongue thrusting between her lips into her mouth. His hot breath mingled with the steam in the bathroom.

"Ah, Liam...ahh..."

She clung to him as if he were her refuge. With his skin pressed to hers, she could forget Jongin for a little while. But she knew better than anyone that this was only a temporary solution.

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The next day, Jennie opened her eyes at sunrise, awakened by an excruciating headache.

She woke with her hands clutching her head to see Liam standing in the doorway with his arms crossed, wearing only a single cloth wrapped around his waist, exposing his upper body. Just outside the open door stood Haban, his face rigid.

"The King of Estia has come with knights."

Jennie tried to pretend she didn't care. But she couldn't. Her body reacted in spite of her, her heart suddenly pounding as memories flashed through her mind. By all rationality and reason, the person she loved should be Jongin. That was who she remembered.

Her headache grew worse as soon as she denied it, and Jennie stifled a moan at the pain. The faint scent of burning drifted past her sensitive nose. Where was it coming from? The question distracted her from the pain long enough that she heard Haban speaking, annoyed.

"You set the orchard on fire?"

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## Chapter 148

### Chapter 148 - Difficult Decision

She hadn't thought Jongin would release her easily.

Jennie knew there was nothing he wouldn't do. But still, she had never expected him to do something like this.

Jennie was in the villa, and still he had set fire to the surrounding orchard, knowing it would endanger her.

Liam clicked his tongue.

"Irritating." Glancing back, he bent and kissed Jennie on the forehead. "You woke up."

Her eyes were still a little dazed, and she nodded.

"Mura," Liam said. There was no hint of urgency or alarm in his voice, and Mura poked her head out from behind Haban, smiling as her eyes caught Jennie's. The Kurkan woman was as calm as her king.

"It's nothing serious, so don't worry," Liam added as he put on his robe, and ordered Mura to remain with Jennie as he left with Haban.

"The air is not good here," Mura observed as she quickly helped Jennie to change her clothes. "We'd better wait for Liam somewhere else."

Jennie a wet handkerchief to cover her nose, they left, but as they were walking down the corridor, Jennie suddenly stopped by the windows.

"...Jennie?"

There were knights approaching, and she could see the Kurkans gathering in front of the house. Dark smoke from the burning peach trees was drifting up into the sky, and the flames were spreading, whipped in all directions by the wind. Soon, it would surround them.

They had to leave this place now.

But no one else seemed anxious about the fire. They weren't making any move to escape. As she saw Liam moving in front of the Kurkans with Haban and Genin at his side, Jennie knew she couldn't leave like this.

"Jennie!"

Without hesitation, Jennie turned and headed back, and Mura only hesitated a moment before she followed.

"I suppose it's understandable," she muttered. "She wouldn't escape and leave her husband to the fire..."

Together the two women hurried down the stairs, and by the time they reached the front of the house both sides had moved into position for battle. Estian knights clad in silver armor were ranged in a line, and there was no fear in their faces, though the flames were practically licking at their heels.

Or to be more precise, there was no expression on their faces at all. Their eyes were unfocused, like toy knights lined up waiting to be moved into battle.

Behind them was Jongin on his white horse with a bow on his back and a sword in his hand, watching the peach orchard burn with indifferent eyes.

The green leaves and unripe fruits were already ashes. Trees groaned and fell over as they burned, charred by the flames. The chaos of the scene seemed to herald an ending.

Jongin had set this fire even though Leah was still imprisoned here. His gaze drifted from the burning trees to the line of Kurkans before him.

They too were ready for battle, their bright eyes reflecting the fire, pupils dilated. There was no fear in their eyes, only great anticipation. At the least provocation, they would rush at the Estian knights.

It was Liam who spoke first, into a silence that seemed even a single word might tilt the balance toward violence.

"Given your entrance, it seems you enjoyed my gift last night," he said, tilting his head to one side.

Jongin's eyes narrowed, glaring at Liam until something behind him caught his attention.

Jennie stood in the front door of the house.

As soon as she made eye contact with him, her headache worsened, so excruciating that she couldn't even remain upright and was forced to lean on Mura, dizzy with pain. Liam frowned as he followed Jongin's eyes and saw Jennie turning pale.

"How can a filthy savage like you dare to desire the princess?" Jongin shouted, enraged.

"Should that concern you?" Liam asked, turning back toward him. "You are no noble. Aren't your veins filled with the humble blood of the Tomaris?"

".....!"

Jongin's face contorted, and Liam smiled as he looked at the other man's reddened, enraged eyes.

"Do it. This time I'll rip your head off."

"Shut up!!!" Jongin shouted, and motioned toward the knights behind him. They dragged forth two bound men and threw them before him. Count Valtein and Minister Laurent.

"Princess!" The two men shouted as they saw Jennie, and Jongin lifted his sword and stabbed it into Count Valtein's thigh.

"Ahhh...!" Count Valtein collapsed to the ground, blood spilling red across the grass. Jennie caught her breath as she watched.

"One at a time, Jennie. Valtein first, then Laurent, then the knights..." Jongin's smile was cruel. "Then I will kill myself last."

He was not sane. Jennie stared at him, paling as he brandished the bloody sword in his hand and suddenly screamed frantically.

"I will kill myself, Jennie! The man you love will die!"

A rattling echo sounded in her ears, a rattling of chains followed by a headache so crushing, she covered her ears with her hands, her head shaking from side to side. And suddenly, she felt someone holding her.

Slowly, she opened her eyes, tears welling from the excruciating pain. As she looked up into golden eyes, the tears slid down her cheeks.

"Liam..." She had to ask the question. "If I leave Estia, I won't get my memories back, right?"

Liam said nothing, but his golden eyes darkened.

She felt her heart clench.

Her eyes went to the flames blazing past his shoulders, Jongin with his blood-stained sword, and the terrified Valtein and Laurent. She didn't want to go to them. The bare thought of the palace filled with all those people blank as dolls made her feel suffocated. She wanted to forget everything and run away to the desert with Liam.

But if she ran away, all of her people would live like this the rest of her lives. She couldn't live wondering and worrying about the people she had left behind.

And she thought of the locked door.

She still hadn't found the key. If she ran away, she would never be able to open it. Everything would be as it was now, and she would never know what lay behind it. The baby wolf she saw in her dreams had risked his life, fighting the chains that bound her. It would be cowardly for her to run away.

And she remembered what the voice she heard beyond the door had said.

*I can do it...no, I have to.*

Jennie steeled herself and looked at Liam. His jaw was already clenched tight as he gritted his teeth. He knew what she was going to say.

"...Jennie."

She said the words he didn't want to hear.

"I can't leave alone."

His voice was strangled when he spoke.

"No, Jennie..."

Jennie had led a peaceful life. She had grown up untroubled, met the love of her life, and they had been about to get married. And then in the midst of this uneventful life, this man had appeared like a stone in that smooth path.

If she had never met Liam, she wouldn't have had a bad life. She would have ruled as Queen of Estia, supporting Jongin. What was her relationship with the King of Kurkan? Why was she so attracted to him? For him, she was willing to give up her title, her first love, and everything else she had.

"I've forgotten you." She looked Liam straight in the eyes. Once she regained her lost memories, she would learn why her mind confused Jongin and Liam so much. She would find the answer. "I'll come back to you. So now..."

She looked up at him and pleaded softly.

"Let me go."

Liam was silent for a long time.

"...You always try my patience," he said finally. His voice was so calm, disconnected from the fire, the line of knights with their swords in hand, and the reek of blood. Gently, he stroked her face, wiping away her tears.

"I have never been defeated," he said bitterly. "But I can never stand



against you."

It was strange to hear this man speak that word. It was probably the first time he had ever admitted defeat in his life. His golden eyes met hers coldly.

"You won't have much time. On the wedding day, I will come for you. This time it won't be a bride kidnapping. I will take my wife back." His large hand gripped her chin as her eyes widened. But he wasn't done. "I will not let you refuse. Even if you cry, and beg, Jennie, I will never let you go."

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## Chapter 149

### Chapter 149 - Reasons

As she walked away, Jennie looked back to see his golden eyes following her, even as Jongin grabbed for her wrists, tugging her onto his horse before him.

Accompanied by the knights, they galloped away through the orchard. Though the fire was burning widely, there were still some places it had not yet reached.

A carriage was waiting outside the orchard. The attendants settled Jennie inside it with a blanket, and her fingers trembled as she clutched it. The moment the door closed, the carriage set off, and she was glued to the window as she watched the flames rising to the sky.

She knew Liam would not be hurt, but she couldn't take her eyes away. She was worried for him. Though he had the strength to keep her by force, he had let her go. Liam had always respected her will.

"Jennie."

She stiffened, looking away from the window. Jongin was seated beside her and drew a deep breath before he spoke.

"What did Lady Mirael do to you?"

Her heart raced. Some part of her automatically acted as if she was pleased at his nearness, but now she was sure. What she felt for Liam was completely different.

"Answer!" Jongin shouted. Jennie glared at him.

"If I don't answer, will you slap me?"

"You...!"

"Will you threaten to kill someone else, to make me obey? Or threaten to kill yourself?" He grabbed her wrist, and she wrenched away. "Let me go."

He looked shocked, looking from his hand to Jennie and back again. Her face was cold and impassive.

"....."

He bit his lip so hard it bled, but it no longer hurt her to see his pain.

"The wedding, if the wedding takes place..."

Jennie turned away and covered her ears. She didn't want to hear his muttering. Her eyes went back to the window, and she felt so uncomfortable being trapped in this small space with Jongin. She couldn't believe she had ever wanted to be near him.

The carriage rolled on for a long time. Eventually she saw the palace in the distance. She had seen it hundreds of times, but now it looked completely alien to her. It was no longer a beautiful place without its gardens and green vegetation. It looked unfamiliar and gloomy.

Even though she had grown up there, it no longer felt like home. As her prison approached, she thought, I will find a way back to him.

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Haban watched Jennie walk away. Though it had been her decision to leave, she looked back more than once.

Estia's knights hurried after her and King Jongin, and the fire roared on, so hot and close it was dangerous. The peach trees were falling over all around them. The Kurkans would be trapped in the fire if they didn't leave soon.

But they didn't move. They were waiting for their King's command.

Liam was still staring in the direction where Jennie had vanished and didn't so much as twitch as Haban approached him.

"Did you know?" The question burst out instead of the warning that they had to leave. Liam's gaze shifted slowly to Haban's, and though everything else was glowing in the fire, his eyes were dark, as if they could not reflect light.

"Did you know Jennie would leave?" Haban repeated the question in spite of his fear. Liam's lips moved slowly.

"...Why would you think that?"

"It's the only reason to keep those people alive."

The King didn't answer. He only smiled bitterly. The Kurkans had gone with Liam to the palace the night before. They had helped to kill Lady Mirael and their knights and left the decapitated heads in Jongin's room. They had indiscriminately killed every Tomari that crossed their path. But they had not harmed Cerdina or Jongin, who deserved death more than anyone else.

Liam had kept them alive, just in case Jennie wanted to regain her memories.

Of course, he wanted to take her to the desert. He did not care what happened to Estia or the people there. He wanted to take his wife to the safest possible place. His only concern was her well-being. He would worry about the rest once Jennie had safely given birth and grown strong again.

Then he would come back and conquer Estia.

But Jennie would not run away. Of her own will, she had returned to the palace to try to take back her lost memories. She chose to face the danger head on.

And she had gone with his baby in her womb.

Liam respected Jennie as much as he loved her. He would always support her and try to help her get what she wanted. But though he could see the cold rationality behind her decision, his emotions were in such a tumult, he could hardly control them.

What should he do? Liam covered his face with his hands and took a long breath. He was so angry. He had convinced himself that even if Jennie said out loud that she loved Jongin, it wouldn't put a dent in his heart. But he had been so wrong. Watching her leave with another man had been torture.

Every time she had looked back, dark thoughts tormented him. Surely, he couldn't sink any lower than this.

Jennie had been right. Liam could not bear the thought that she might have someone else in her heart.

All he wanted to do was make her happy. He had hoped she would have fun, that she would laugh more, and that he could free her to follow the voice in her heart. But now she had lost all of that. How arrogant he had been. He had promised to protect her, and then she had been stolen from him right before his eyes.

Maybe this was a punishment. Perhaps he was paying the price for not searching for her sooner, and leaving her to be mistreated in the palace for so long. If only they had met earlier, or if he had understood his feelings for her from the moment they met...but he could not turn back the clock.

There was no point in looking back.

For now, they needed to leave this place.

Liam turned back to the Kurkans, waiting silently for his decision.

"We will return to the capital," he said quietly.

"Yes," said Genin quickly. "What will we do now?"

"What we can."

They had taught Cerdina and Jongin a lesson. Surely it would cow them, at least for a little bit. Cerdina in particular was bound by the fear that Liam would get his hands on her son.

They would wait for the wedding, as they had planned. He would do his best to help Jennie get her memories back. Liam looked at the burning orchard.

"I allowed her to leave...but that doesn't mean I've left her alone."

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Barefoot, Cerdina walked unsteadily through the palace.

Dirty, with disheveled hair and wearing only a thin nightgown, it was hard to believe she was the Queen Mother. Her cheeks were so tight and swollen with bruises, she couldn't even move her mouth to speak without pain.

All the way back to the Queen's Palace, she walked through corridors that reeked of blood. Every step sounded sticky, the floor tacky with blood as she lifted her feet.

As she walked through the corpses of her blood brothers, a laugh burst from her, and then a sob, her shoulders shaking. Laughing and sobbing, the noises echoing down the corridor, the sounds of a madwoman.

Her blood brothers had shared her dream of conquering the world, and they had all been slain by beasts. Cerdina did not understand why her spells didn't work on the barbarian king.

She was a sorceress who had inherited the first power, the power possessed by the sorceress who created the Kurkan. That strength was powerfully significant to the Tomaris. Her failure was their failure.

All her spells had been useless. Cerdina stopped laughing at that thought.

"...He is a mutant," she whispered into the eerie silence. It must be. The appearance of such mutation was what had caused the Toma's downfall. There was no spell she could use against such a creature.

She had thought she was a god. But she was wrong.

Cerdina screamed, her fingers yanking at her hair, sucking in a breath to try to control her rage. She needed more power. Power enough to destroy even the mutant beast king.

Cerdina crouched beside the nearest corpse and lifted her dagger, her face expressionless. Black smoke enveloped the blade and she plunged it into the corpse's chest.

Deftly, she sliced through the flesh to cut out the heart and ate it,

clutching the bloody dagger in her other hand. Once she had swallowed it all, she moved on to the next body. The sound of wet, raw flesh being torn and chewed echoed through the halls.

Black smoke rose around her feet, thicker than ever, writhing as if it were alive.

"I'll kill him," she muttered over and over as she devoured the hearts of her blood brothers. "I'll kill him...I'll kill him...I'll kill him..."

And she smiled, a bloody smile.

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## Chapter 150

### Chapter 150 - Strange Potion

Soon the King of Estia would be married.

Oddly, it would be to his half-sister, the Princess Jennie. But the nobles of Estia accepted this unusual marriage without any objection. Even the emissaries from other countries began to accept it as if it were natural, though they had been clearly uncomfortable when they first arrived.

It seemed that the longer they stayed in the palace, the more accepting they became of the incestuous marriage. They were no different from the Estian nobles.

"Why does no one express another opinion?"

The clear voice echoed through the Cabinet Council.

Jennie looked at the line of noblemen sitting there like scarecrows. An elderly gentleman with a dense white beard spoke.

"It's because I think the Princess is right."

"I will obey the will of the royal family," another man agreed.

"Please don't misunderstand our loyalty," said a third.

Jennie had to laugh at this loyalty to the royal family.

"If I said I planned to behead all of you," Jennie began, looking at them coldly, "would you agree with that, as well?"

They blinked as if they didn't understand the question. Even Minister Laurent looked perplexed when she met his eyes. The seat beside him where Count Valtein always sat was empty.

"That's enough," Jennie declared. "That will conclude today's meeting."



There were still more problems to discuss, but these meetings were pointless. No one discussed anything.

Jennie would just have to take care of them on her own.

The noblemen remained behind after the meeting, huddling in groups and chatting as they always had.

Conversations about casual topics seemed normal.

They even burst out laughing occasionally. Jennie was the only one who didn't belong.

It would have been easy just to go along with it. Everything would have flowed like water, if she just let it happen. But Jennie didn't plan to give in.

Pursing her lips, she looked at the crowd around her.

She had to make them uncomfortable.

Jennie had realized the strangeness of her situation partially with Liam's help, but even before he had come, she had had a constant sense that something was wrong. That feeling was what had first awakened her to the possibility of a problem.

She had tried to provoke them today, but nothing had worked so far. She needed something more extreme to jolt them awake.

Lost in her thoughts, she was about to leave the conference when someone moved to intercept her.

Jennie looked up, startled.

"Seokjin Of Oberde...?"

"Let the light shine on Estia," Jin said politely. "It's good to see you, Princess."

Seokjin Of Oberde ruled the western border, the territory bordering Kurkan. He was politically influential, so it was important to maintain a good relationship with him, but Jennie didn't like him

much. He had a creepy air about him and kept stealing glances at her body whenever they spoke.

She had caught him watching her almost obsessively, and when she wore dresses with a lower-cut bodice, like today, he shamelessly stared at her cleavage.

And when he bent to kiss the back of her hand, his lips lingered longer than they should have.

If she hadn't been a princess, she felt sure that he would have used his influence to do worse.

But today, he wasn't doing any of those things.

Instead the normally arrogant man just looked frightened, wiping a visible sweat from his forehead with a handkerchief. Jennie looked at him in puzzlement as he hesitated.

"Maybe the Princess..." He began awkwardly. "The barbarians..."

Her eyes widened at the mention of the Kurkans, and she waited for him to finish the thought. But Seokjin shut his mouth.

"It was nothing. A slip of the tongue," he said.

"Please forget it."

Though she tried to stop him, he quickly escaped without even a token attempt at dignity. Stunned, Jennie left the conference room soon after.

Why was he suddenly behaving that way? It must mean something. Next time, she would catch him and question him.

"Princess." Her ladies-in-waiting bowed and fell into step behind her as she returned to her palace.

All the knights and ladies who had been at the peach orchard had returned safely. She had heard they had been given a sleep elixir, and when they woke up, they had been taken away and trapped in some faraway place. They had eventually been released and allowed to

return.

And none of them spoke of it. As if it were forbidden.

The troublesome Lady Mirael had disappeared without a trace. There was no sign she had even visited her new, luxurious mansion. And Jongin was completely disinterested in her disappearance. No one in the palace even spoke of her.

It was as if she had never existed.

Lady Mirael's disappearance wasn't the only strange thing. Cerdina was too quiet. Normally, she lived noisily and publicly, with tea parties and falcon hunting with noblewomen during the day, and invitations for men to join her at her palace at night.

But lately, it was as quiet as if she were dead. She stayed locked in her room and refused all visitors, even Jongin

Jongin was just as strange. He knew Jennie had lost her engagement ring, but said nothing about it. In the past, he would have been furious, but there was no yelling at all, much less any slapping.

Much had changed since the day the peach orchard burned to ashes.

Pausing mid-step, Jennie turned to look up at the sky. It was cloudy again. It had been cloudy for days.

Only in the capital.

Liam had told her about spells the other day, and at the time she had paid no attention because it seemed so silly. But could the weather be affected by spells?

Logically, the ones responsible were most likely to be the ones that benefited. She didn't even have to think deeply about it. All the strange things that had happened had raised up Cerdina and Jongin. The new king was enjoying absolute power, thanks to the nobles who had become as obedient as dolls. He was still trying to command Jennie's heart the same way.

There was a high probability that something inside the palace could

cast powerful spells. Whatever it was, it would be linked to both Cerdina and Jongin.

Then there was the recent increase in Tomaris in the capital, and the fact that Cerdina had allowed them to enter the palace as servants. The chain of events clicked through her mind.

Thoughtfully, Jennie looked at her head lady-in-waiting. Countess Melissa had been an important part of her life. But suddenly Baroness Cinael's face was superimposed over the countess's, along with that emotionless, vacant smile. The sincere way the baroness had cried...

Even though Countess Melissa was now a stranger, she could be saved. Returning back to her palace, Jennie went to change her clothes.

"I'm going out today," she said. "Just with the knights. I need fresh air."

She planned to visit Baroness Cinael, and didn't want to report her destination beforehand, in case she was being watched. She knew the location of that small farm. She would go there, and if the baroness was away, she would leave a letter for her.

Jennie climbed into her carriage. Her knights would follow at some distance, dressed in civilian clothes. She had told them she did not want to attract attention. But as they drove through the busy streets of the capital, the carriage came to a sudden halt.

"Get out of the way!" The coachman shouted angrily.

Sliding the curtains outside, Jennie looked out the window. There was a woman outside the carriage with many colorful bracelets on her wrists, carrying a small wicker basket filled with roses. Jennie pushed open the window between herself and the coachman.

"Let her approach," she told him. "I want to buy roses."

"But...!"

"Why worry if the knights are nearby?"

The coachman frowned, but had to obey. But he couldn't resist threatening the Toma woman.

"Consider yourself lucky! You may approach the carriage, but don't act recklessly."

The old woman nodded slowly.

"I'd like to buy some roses," Jennie said, pushing open the other window. The Toma woman looked at her through narrowed eyes, frowning. It gave her a strange sense of déjà vu.

"Come closer," Jennie commanded. She wanted to see that woman's face in detail. Even as she was searching through her memories, a voice interrupted her.

"I want to apologize," the old woman whispered. "I sold a potion the other day...I didn't know the Princess would drink it. As I get older, my eyes can read the sky."

A vision flashed through Jennie's mind of dark streets and the shape of a large back before her, hiding her as she spied on a group of Tomaris.

Pain stabbed through her head and Jennie bit her tongue to keep back a cry, struggling to conceal it.

She could not appear weak before a stranger.

"Not all Tomaris follow their will. Just like in the beginning." The Toma woman held out her basket filled with roses, offering it to Jennie. "I have seen the future. I would like to ask you for something."

Jennie stared at the basket of roses without touching it.

"When the day of judgment comes, have mercy on the innocent." The old woman's eyes were filled with fear, and those wrinkled hands trembled as they offered the basket like an apology. "We won't be allowed to live."

"I don't know what you're talking about," Jennie said coldly.

The Toma woman smiled, sad and gentle.

"I am begging the Queen of Kurkan for our lives."

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## Chapter 151

### Chapter 151 — Precipitated Meeting

The words shocked her. The title Queen of Kurkan echoed in her mind. But outwardly, Jennie was unperturbed.

"You're talking nonsense," she said. "Why would I have to save your life?"

Rummaging through the basket of roses with one hand, the Toma woman showed her a glass bottle filled with black liquid, hidden among the flowers. A Tomari potion.

"This will help clear your mind," she said. "If you have any doubts, then ask those that are guarding you what this potion is for."

At first Jennie thought she meant the knights. But her knights couldn't possibly know anything about strange potions. And then Jennie understood who the old woman meant.

"...I'll take the roses."

As Jennie took the basket, the Toma woman thanked her profusely.

"But I can't guarantee your life," Jennie clarified. "I don't have that power."

The old woman smiled as if she had heard something funny.

"The Kurkans will always follow the wishes of their Queen," she whispered. "Please don't forget this meeting."

And the old Toma woman walked away. The coachman spat in her direction and snapped the reins, starting the carriage forward. Jennie closed the window and slid the curtains back into place, stroking the petals of the roses in the basket. She hadn't seen fresh flowers since she left the peach orchard.

Her head lowered.

She wanted Liam.

She had decided to return to the palace of her own will, despite the bitterness of their separation, and she was determined that she would have something to show for it. She had to do everything she could in the time he had given her.

Caressing the flower petals, she imagined what it would be like, once she had regained all her memories. She would be able to stand by his side without any shadows to trouble her.

As she was lost in these thoughts, the carriage made its way to a small farm and halted. Climbing out of the carriage, Jennie walked over to the gate, which was locked with a large padlock. When she peered over the fence, she saw that the place was overgrown with weeds. It looked abandoned.

Somehow, Jennie did not think it would have been in this condition if Baroness Cinael had been taking care of it. But Jennie didn't believe she had sold it, either. She would have to find another time to go to the modest mansion where the baroness had lived.

Leaving the small farm behind, Jennie set out for the center of town. Her next destination was a quiet two-story teahouse. There weren't many customers. It was a good place to relax, but today she had not come for tea.

As she descended the carriage, the knights moved to follow her, but Jennie halted them.

"Wait for me outside," she instructed. "Besides, today's errands are private."

"We can't do that, Princess."

She chuckled at their worried expressions.

"Since when do you care about my safety?"

"Princess...!"

"You were all asleep at the orchard," she said.



"Someone slipped you a sleeping elixir. Who could have done such a thing?"

"....."

"My ladies-in-waiting could not possibly be so friendly with Lady Mirael," Jennie said, with exaggerated thoughtfulness. "So I suppose the traitor must be one of you."

The faces of the knights turned rigid.

"Remember that it is I who spared your lives," Jennie said coldly, and entered the teahouse alone.

The employees there had hosted the princess several times before, so one of them led her to a table on the second floor without comment. Jennie dismissed the server and then stood alone, looking out the window.

Well-dressed people were walking about on the street outside.

As she sat in a patch of sunlight and sipped at her tea, she decided to check and see if she was being followed. Suddenly, she set down her teacup and began to breathe in heavy, labored gasps. She clutched at her belly, a sound of pain escaping her.

"Ahhh...!"

"Jennie!"

Instantly, a man appeared from the shadows of the high ceiling, dropping to the floor as softly as a cat. It was Haban, one of Liam's escorts. His face was pale.

"Are you all right? I'll go get Morga right now...!"

He was about to dive out the window when Jennie sat up straight and looked at him calmly. Haban stopped.

"Doesn't your stomach hurt...?" He asked quizzically.

Jennie shook her head. She hadn't had any stomach pains since she

had come back from the orchard.

"My heart almost burst!" Haban clutched his chest and sighed heavily.

"Liam ordered you to follow me?" Jennie asked quietly.

"Oh, I'm not following you, I'm just...escorting you to make sure nothing happens to you. Genin wanted to, but she was worried she wouldn't be able to hide. She's too big," Haban explained, and immediately apologized. "I'm sorry. It was rude to not ask your permission."

"No. I'm quite relieved to have you around."

The dejected Haban's eyes lit up.

"Really?"

"Of course I am."

Haban's face lit up and Jennie couldn't help chuckling. He looked adorable.

"I feel like I lost ten years of my life," he said as he took the chair across from her.

"Let's talk for a moment." Jennie pushed the untouched snacks toward him and Haban was soon munching on them, one by one. "...He must be very angry, right?"

There was no need to say who. Haban swallowed his cookie.

"You don't have to worry about that," he said, waving a hand nonchalantly. "Kurkans are very devoted to their mates, it's our nature. If you shed a single tear, Liam will say that it is his failure."

Thinking back to the last time she had seen him, it didn't seem to Jennie that Liam was easily upset.

Haban eyed her as she sat silently.

"Liam is too sure of himself," he said cautiously. "I don't understand

how he can say it doesn't matter if you have someone else in your heart..."

There were a number of things troubling Haban. It didn't make sense for Liam to accept such a thing so easily, or to so quickly abandon the plan to take her back to the desert.

"I don't know how to explain it," he went on. "It's just, since he has such a strong personality...I don't think you should read too much into it. I mean, emotionally."

He clutched his head.

"I sound like Genin. Anyway, I think it's best just to let things...flow, for now."

"...I see." Jennie fiddled with her cold cup of tea, thinking. "I have something to ask you."

Haban's eyes widened.

"There's a place I'd like to visit. I was wondering if you could accompany me tonight."

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After she returned to her palace, Jennie waited for the night to deepen. While she waited, she took out a robe from her closet and put it on. Some time later, she heard the sound of someone tapping on glass, and she opened the doors to her balcony and stepped outside. Haban was squatting on the railing of the balcony.

Lifting Jennie in his arms, he left the palace, and soon they were an alley in the city, listening to the noise of the nearby night market. The alley was set back away from the lights of the market, so it was quite dark.

According to that flash of memory, this was the alley where she had seen the Tomaris. Though she could only vaguely describe the place and had no idea where it was, Haban knew exactly what she was talking about.

Slowly, she looked around the alley. In the past, she had been hiding behind someone. She had hoped she would remember more if she came here in person, but nothing came to her mind.

But she was not disappointed. She planned to visit all the places she had experienced this sense of *déjà vu*. Next, she would return to that old inn, where Liam had fed her.

".....?"

For a moment, Jennie doubted her eyes when she saw someone walking in the distance. She couldn't see his face, but she recognized him just from his silhouette.

It was Seokjin. Quickly, he looked around and then ducked into another alley. What was he doing here without escorts in such an isolated place? Maybe they should follow him.

"Why don't we go somewhere else...?" Haban suggested cautiously.

He was uneasy, and it seemed like he knew something. Jennie stared at him until Haban shifted, his posture radiating discomfort. Just as she was about to ask what he knew, Seokjin suddenly burst back out of the alley, screaming.

"Ahh!!!!"

Bloodstained Tomaris followed him a moment later, fleeing for their lives in terror. But they didn't get far. Figures suddenly appeared from the darkness, and as they lunged for the Tomaris, Haban grabbed for Jennie and pushed her behind the wall of a nearby alley, hurriedly covering her eyes.

She still heard the terrible sound of bones breaking.

She heard horrible screams. There was the smell of blood. When the sounds stopped, Jennie pushed Haban's hand away from her face and peeked around the corner.

Those were Kurkans standing among the corpses.

That was what first caught her attention. Then she saw a man

emerging from the darkness, approaching Seokjin with blood dripping from his hands. Those cold golden eyes were terrifying. Though she knew he had no intention of doing her harm, just looking at him made Jennie shudder.

Seokjin, covered in blood, was begging for his life.

"Please, just...just let me...live..."

Liam silently puffed on a cigar for a moment, studying the other man. He exhaled a cloud of smoke.

"Why were you going to the Tomaris?" His head tilted. "Didn't you do it because you wanted to die soon?"

"Oh, no...no, Liam..." Seokjin stammered, and then suddenly shouted. "I had to make sure I really wasn't under any spell!"

Spells?

This was completely unexpected. Perhaps this explained Seokjin's 's strange behavior at the Cabinet Council meeting.

"Jennie..." Behind her, Haban whispered. "I don't think you need to see these things."

He said something else about the cruelty of the scene, but Jennie was focused on listening to Seokjin.

"I know it's hard to believe, no matter how I try to prove it, but I know Tomaris, skilled ones..." He was mumbling, rambling endlessly, and it made Jennie want to slap him until he pulled himself together and started making sense.

But it was a surprise that he was offering this bizarre idea, and she thought about it. Suddenly, he shut his mouth, and a different voice echoed down the silent alley.

"You can come out."

Jennie had thought they were well hidden, but somehow Liam had perceived them. She glanced at Haban, but he only shook his head, as

if this were inevitable. There was no choice but to come out and face the other Kurkans.

Liam's face was expressionless as he drew on his cigar, watching them through narrowed eyes.

"Good evening, Liam," Haban said awkwardly.

Jennie was no less stilted as she pushed back the hood of her robe.

"Greetings, King of Kurkan."

"....."

Liam said nothing. His eyes shifted back to Haban.

"She didn't see anything!" Haban said quickly. "I covered her eyes right away! But how could I keep her from hearing it?"

Even as he spoke, the Kurkans were silently concealing the other corpses. Jennie saw Genin slyly pushing away something stumpy and bloody that was probably part of someone's body. Jennie looked away.

Liam sighed and pitched his cigar onto the bloody ground, then reached for the handkerchief Genin offered to wipe the blood from his hands. Jennie's lips pursed.

She wasn't ready to see him again. Soon, there would be the wedding, and a number of events in which the delegates from other countries would be invited to participate, so she had expected to see him once or twice at the palace. She had never imagined that they would meet again like this.

He looked at her as he finished wiping his hands, and she found herself holding her breath as he slowly approached. But he stopped some distance away. Perhaps five steps from her, but the distance seemed endless. There was only silence between them until Seokjin lifted his head.

"Oh, Princess!" He flung himself at her, clinging to her feet like she was his lifeline. "Help me, these crazy savages...!"

"You're not very bright." Haban kicked the other man, but Seokjin only clung tighter, weeping. When Jennie started to teeter, unbalanced from his desperate grip, Liam intervened.

"Enough," he snapped coldly. Seokjin let go of her so quickly, it was as if he had been feigning his desperation, and Haban shoved him into a corner of the alley. And Jennie and Liam's eyes found each other again, from a distance of five steps away.

"I think I smell blood," Liam said, and then fell silent again. "...Never mind."

It was a new silence. It felt as if an invisible wall had been erected between them, and Jennie found herself twining her fingers together anxiously until Liam decided to end this encounter.

"I want you to go home soon," he said, turning away.

"The wind is too cold tonight."

"Wait," she called, as he moved to depart. "Your Majesty Liam! Lia...Liam."

He turned back, crossing his arms. There was none of the usual warmth in his eyes. Though it was nothing compared to his murderous stare, it was cold enough that her heart tightened.

She remembered how he had looked at their last parting. He had acted relaxed, but he had not hidden his anger from her. A rage hotter than the fire that devoured the orchard had been burning in those golden eyes. It might be too soon to appease his wrath, but she still searched quickly for something to talk to him about.

"A Toma woman gave me a potion," she said quickly.

"If you give it to Haban, we will see what's in it."

More silence. Jennie racked her brain and the words burst out of her, the first thing she could think of.

"Da, dates!"

She didn't know why this had occurred to her and instantly regretted it, but Jennie had no choice but to press on.

"...I ate almost all the dates you gave me."

"I'll send you more." Liam turned away. "I'll send them with Haban."

Looking at his back, her heart raced. This wasn't enough, she wanted to see him more. She didn't want to say goodbye like this. But it was embarrassing to ask him to stay when she had been the one to leave him behind in the peach orchard.

She should satisfy herself with this limited conversation, she knew it, but she couldn't restrain herself.

"Besides..." The word burst out impulsively, and her voice sounded very faint and small even in the silent alley. Liam stopped, and Jennie pursed her lips. She had expected him to keep going.

"Besides?" He asked shortly.

If she hesitated, he would disappear. She had one chance, and this time she wanted to say something that came from her heart, but her mind was blank.

She didn't know what to say.

"I miss you..." She mumbled. Simple, nervous words.

It was coherent, but so embarrassing, it would be a miracle if no one laughed.

But Liam didn't laugh. His eyes softened, and Jennie steeled herself.

"I'm trying to find my memories," she said, rushing to explain herself even though he hadn't asked. "I came here because I saw...something."

She glanced at Haban, who was waving his arm in the air behind Liam and mouthing exaggerated words.

**Ask him for help!**



She hesitated. She had been trying to do it herself, without his help. But this time, it might be better to take Haban's advice.

"I think it's too much to do alone," she mumbled.

"It's overwhelming...without you, Liam..."

Haban nodded enthusiastically. Beside him, Genin echoed the gesture silently.

"Can you help me?" Jennie asked, picking out each word, and Liam nodded.

"Tell me what you want."

Jennie had been curious about many things, but given the opportunity, she began with the issue that troubled her most.

"Are there any Tomaris casting spells inside the palace?"

"The Queen Mother."

That was unexpected. Jennie blinked.

"Her Majesty the Queen Mother?" She asked, bewildered. That meant Cerdina was a Toma woman. "Cerdina is a Tomari?"

The words struck her like lightning. So many speculations linked together and so many things were instantly clear, as soon as she had this crucial piece. Had Cerdina hidden her true identity? Or had Jennie's father accepted her, knowing this fact?

Jennie bit her lower lip, trying to organize her thoughts and prioritize her questions.

"I have to meet with Count Weddleton," she said. Count Weddleton was Cerdina's father. He was not involved in politics, but thanks to her influence, he had amassed an enormous fortune. And surely Cerdina would not have ensorcelled her own father.

If she could get the count to reveal that Cerdina was a Tomari, that might shake up the people in the palace enough to wake them up.

"How do you plan to persuade him?" Liam asked, after she had explained her plan.

"First, I will summon him to my palace to open a conversation with him..." she began.

"No way he's going to do it that easily."

Of course, she wanted to find a way to intimidate Count Weddleton, but Benita knew nothing she came up with would compare to Liam's ideas. And sure enough, Liam jerked his chin toward Seokjin.

"Fortunately, there is someone we can use as an example."

All the Kurkans who had been watching with bated breath immediately surged toward Liam, surrounding him and clamoring a protest.

"...You have to think about the baby..."

"You shouldn't cut off his head now!"

"You might scare her!"

Baby? Scare her?

Liam scowled at Jennie's confusion and the Kurkans scattered, even though he hadn't said a word.

"You've been so angry lately," some of them murmured. "So..."

Liam ignored them. Approaching Jennie, he held out his hand.

"We're going to visit Count Wedleton."

"Now?"

Of course, an unannounced visit in the middle of the night would successfully intimidate him, but this was too sudden. Liam paused at her sudden silence.

"You don't want to?"

"It's not that."

She grabbed his hand. A faint smile appeared on his face, which had been expressionless until that moment.

"I've thought it through," she said. "It's better that you're by my side."

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## Chapter 152

### Chapter 152 — Count Weddlestone's Mansion

#### - long chapter -

Just like that, Liam was lifting Jennie into his arms to go see Count Weddlestone. Behind him, Haban was stuffing the unconscious Seokjin into a sack and lifting it onto his back.

"Wasn't his head going to be cut off?" Genin asked.

Jennie shuddered.

"Not now," Haban replied, to Jennie's relief.

"...I'm worried," Genin muttered. "A fight between a couple is like cutting water with a knife..."

Jennie would have liked to hear more, but Liam suddenly interrupted them with a sharp command in Kurkan that she didn't understand. Immediately, the Kurkans vanished, melting into the darkness.

"We will visit the Count." Liam began to move, carrying Jennie in his arms as he explained what they would do. Under the moonlight, Jennie was quickly absorbed in her thoughts.

She had so many questions. She wanted to know what orders he had given the Kurkans, why they had been following Seokjin, and she wanted to tell him about the Toma woman she had met. The list of things she wanted to talk about kept growing.

But she didn't dare speak. The atmosphere was not welcoming. In spite of her curiosity, she lay silent in his arms until they reached the count's residence.

Count Weddlestone's mansion had large gardens in the front and the back, but all the plants were dead.

Under the dead flowers, brown and dusty earth was exposed. Behind the barren gardens lay a magnificent mansion, but there was a

curiously hushed atmosphere even with all the lights on.

Jennie gazed at the mansion, breathless. The mansion was just like the palace.

"There are often Tomaris...in the count's mansion," murmured Liam, peering intently into the darkness.

Tomaris who were denied entry to the palace were still welcomed at the count's mansion.

As if he were checking for something, Liam waited, and then began to move again.

They saw no one as they entered the mansion. The inside was just as silent as the outside. Anyone might have wondered if there was anyone alive in the whole place.

Silently, Liam set Jennie down, and they walked together through long, empty corridors, with marble floors and wide windows. They should have let in light, but clouds covered the moon, and the house was filled with gloom.

The soft sounds of their footsteps echoed through the corridors. Jennie could see nothing but the wide back of the man in front of her, and her heart felt as heavy as if a stone hung from it. She hesitated for some time before she was able to speak.

"Liam!"

Silently, he turned to look down at her, and she couldn't think of anything else to say. He looked at her, and somehow she knew he was staring at her lips. His eyes were fixed on them as she searched for something to say, and he watched her small tongue move, and stop.

Jennie's face felt hot. Unconsciously, she closed her mouth and lowered her eyes, unable to speak.

".....!"

His powerful arms wrapped around her waist and a large hand seized

the back of her neck. His sturdy body embraced hers.

Abruptly, their lips were crushed together, and Jennie had only a moment for a gasp of surprise. His golden eyes gleamed. Turning his head to one side, his tongue thrust into her mouth.

She couldn't close her eyes. His soft tongue ran over her lips with a soft, wet sound, and she felt a tingle below. Automatically, she squeezed her thighs together.

"Hmm..." The moan escaped from deep in her throat, and the sound was so filled with pleasure it embarrassed her, but she couldn't stop it. Her body shuddered. Her trembling fingertips ran down his back, and shyly, Jennie embraced him.

Liam moaned hoarsely at her touch. The sound excited her, crackling through her like she was kindling set in the midst of the flames, and she dug her nails into his back and kissed him with passion.

She forgot everything else.

Suddenly, everything around her was bright. It took a moment to realize it was not Liam. The moon that had been hidden behind dark clouds had come out, and was shining through the windows.

Jennie looked up at Liam, her breathing ragged. This man looked so beautiful in the dark, and he was even more lovely by moonlight. It took an effort to steady herself and slow her breathing when his golden eyes were looking at her, suffused with pleasure.

"Why are you moving your lips so much?" He whispered softly, licking her lips. "It provokes me to kiss you."

It felt unfair that he should blame her when she wasn't doing it on purpose, and his hands slid down to squeeze her buttocks.

"Y-your hands..." She protested, blushing, and he let go of her backside and hugged her again. Tears welled just from being in his arms, and Jennie pressed her lips together. She couldn't stop the tears from filling her eyes and finally spilling down her cheeks.

"...Jennie?"

She buried her face in his chest. She didn't want him to see her crying, but Liam grabbed her chin and lifted it, forcing her to show him her tear-stained face.

"Do you hate kissing me that much?" He asked.

"No!" She said tearfully. His lips moved around her eyes, brushing her wet lashes, and even this made warmed her inside. She closed her eyes, sobbing.

Liam ignoring her felt worse than she had ever imagined. The sight of his back turned to her had made her so uncomfortable, even though nothing at all had happened. Maybe there was a voice inside her that was terrified that this man would never look back, once he turned away from her. And one simple kiss had meant so much, she had sobbed with relief.

It might have seemed silly, but not to her. Suddenly she understood something so deeply, it was as if it had been carved on her heart.

*I can't live without this man.*

She rubbed her face against his chest to hide her tears. Her emotions had been all over the place lately, it seemed like everything made her cry. And as she was trying to pull herself together, something twisted in her abdomen.

It was a strange sensation in her belly, a fluttering like something was moving inside her. Her hand went automatically to the place, and she could feel it under her fingers. Something...moving.

".....!"

Jennie paled. When she had felt something like this before, she thought it was because of Cerdina's tea.

But she wasn't drinking that anymore, so it shouldn't be happening, but...she felt it move again.

Even as she froze in shock, Liam quickly covered her hand with his.

"What?" He asked urgently, searching for whatever was troubling her.

"Does it hurt?"

"No..." She said, as his big hand rested against her belly. "Something is...moving in my stomach. I thought it was because of that tea..."

Liam was calm as he listened, and even opened his mouth as if he wanted to speak, but then shut it again.

"I think we should call a doctor," she said seriously.

Just like that, her eyes were dry and her voice steady. "I don't understand why this is happening..."

"You don't need a doctor. You're not sick."

"Is it a spell?"

"No, it's not that."

Liam signed, and for the first time, seemed to hesitate.

"Try not to be too shocked," he began, his hand still resting on her belly. "Jennie, you're pregnant."

Jennie blinked. She blinked several times.

"...What?" She finally managed, shocked.

It didn't make sense. It was unbelievable.

"How...?" She asked, bewildered.

"And after we both tried so hard," Liam said.

She stared at him in disbelief. She expected him to tell her it was a joke, but while he sounded wry, there was no sign he was anything but serious.

"So...the baby is...ours. Yours and mine," she said faintly.

"Who else would you do it with?" Liam demanded, a little angrily.

"....."



Jennie couldn't answer that question. Her arms crossed defensively.

"I understand I've forgotten things. I've forgotten all about it, but now you're telling me I'm pregnant when I...I can't conceive?"

Liam's head bent forward, so close their noses brushed, and Jennie found she was holding her breath.

"Do you want me to teach you?" His voice was deep and fierce. "How we made our baby?"

Her ears burned at those words. Jennie retreated a step.

"I don't think you have to teach me..."

Of course, she knew how babies were made. The principles of sexual reproduction were taught to all members of the royal family. What she didn't know was when she had gotten pregnant. Her head was spinning with questions, and he was casually saying such embarrassing things. And he wasn't done shocking her, either.

"You were the one who told me you wanted to get pregnant," he said.

".....?"

Jennie had barely managed to settle down and suddenly her heart was racing again. Liam advanced slowly as she retreated.

"You said you wanted to have my child."

Her back hit the wall, and Liam loomed over her, his head bent toward hers.

"So I filled you all up." His arms were on either side of her, effectively imprisoning her. "You've forgotten, Jennie."

He shut his mouth, and looking up into those blazing golden eyes, her own mouth was dry. Jennie swallowed hard. She remembered that day when they had gone to bed together. He had never hesitated when he touched her. It was as if he knew everything about her, and knew exactly where to touch her.

The memory of how his fingers had felt when they penetrated her sprang vividly to her mind. He hadn't stopped even when she squirmed.

"Liam..." She began cautiously, but he just looked at her silently. There was a tension between them that she couldn't understand, an awkwardness that she didn't know how to fix. Suddenly, Liam's eyes shifted away from her.

He was looking out the window. Jennie turned automatically to follow his eyes. Outside, a carriage was arriving. It had no emblem or markings to identify its owner. Quickly, the coachman descended to open the door.

With a contemptuous look at his surroundings, Jongin stepped from the carriage, his silver hair shining gracefully in the moonlight.

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The banquet hall of the Weddleston mansion was filled with Tomaris.

Seated on the floor or leaning against the wall, they were scattered everywhere. Dozens of them had gathered together in unusual silence, until a sob suddenly burst from a young Toma girl.

"She has eaten my sister's heart!" She cried out, tears streaming down her cheeks. Her eyes were red and bloodshot with weeping as she struck her chest.

"Look how she repays us for our aid!"

The other Tomaris were silent as she screamed. No one moved to console her. But they also did not try to silence her.

Cerdina had asked for the help of all the Tomaris on the continent. At her invitation, they had all come to Estia under the illusion that they would be creating a country of their own, a home for the Toma. Accustomed to wandering, it had been hard for them to gather like this.

But they had come and helped her to finish her spell.

She had been preparing that spell for years, and completing it had given her enormous power. Soon, they would have claimed the whole continent, and made a world for the Toma.

But then the Kurkans had come and slaughtered all the Tomaris in the royal palace, a sudden massacre that Cerdina did not stop. Cerdina could not protect them. And instead of mourning the dead, she had devoured their hearts for still more power.

The Toma had considered Cerdina a sister, but it seemed she did not feel the same for them. She claimed that they shared the same blood, but she treated them like objects, animals whose hearts she would devour if necessary.

The Tomaris could no longer avoid facing this reality.

"The power has driven her mad," said an old woman sitting in the corner, surrounded by wicker baskets filled with roses. She looked at all the rest of them.

"It doesn't matter if she is a sorceress who has inherited the first power. She has limits. She is not a god."

At that moment, the banquet hall doors swung open.

All the Tomaris turned to look as the King of Estia appeared, followed by Count Weddleton.

Jongin's eyes were cold as he looked at the gathered Toma, and whispers rose as he walked to the center of the banquet hall.

"A false king..."

"But now he really possesses noble blood."

"Someone who will make a world for us..."

As he listened to the whispers, one corner of Jongin's mouth lifted.

"Cerdina!" cried out the sobbing Toma girl, as all the other Tomaris held their breath. "Where is Cerdina? She should have come herself!"

Jongin frowned at the careless use of the Queen Mother's name, but decided to overlook it. She was just an ignorant Toma girl.

"She is ill," he explained benevolently. "I have come in her place. In this case, I do not think you need to express condolences."

"How dare you?!" The Toma girl rose to her feet with a shriek, and Count Weddleton retreated as Jongin kicked her away.

"The Queen Mother will surely compensate you," he said as she fell backward. "I hope you will be patient until then."

Turning to face all of them, he spread his arms wide.

"After the wedding, all the world will belong to the Tomaris. If you have been waiting for centuries, you can wait a few days more. Everyone will wait for the right moment."

The Tomaris were silent at this declaration that their long-prophesied dream would finally come to pass. Jongin smiled.

"Are there any among you who can cast spells?"

An old woman stepped forward, leaving many small baskets of roses behind her. Other Tomaris slowly followed.

"Carriages will be sent," Jongin told them. "You will come to the palace in the morning."

He turned away, and the girl that he had kicked gritted her teeth and staggered back to her feet.

"A monster spawned a monster!" She screamed at his back. The piercing shriek rang through the hall.

"You will not die in peace! You will be torn apart by beasts, just like my sister!"

Jongin only laughed derisively, and left the banquet hall without looking back. Count Weddleton hurried after him nervously.

"I'm sorry, Your Majesty," he apologized. "She still has things to

learn."

"I know. You don't need to apologize for them."

Jongin paused, looking back at the count. "Shall we drink?"

Though he was puzzled by the sudden offer, the count directed Jongin into the drawing room without hesitation and poured his best wine into two glasses. Sitting down on the sofa, Jongin sipped from his glass with a bitter smile.

It was strange that the only person he had left to drink with was his grandfather. They occasionally went hunting together, but they had never had a close relationship. But since all the nobility of Estia had become Cerdina's puppets, there were no other companions available, if he wanted to drink with a normal person.

Jongin drained his glass quickly. With drunkenness came memories he didn't want, unpleasantly vivid.

*'If I don't answer, will you slap me?'*

*'Will you threaten to kill someone else, to make me obey? Or threaten to kill yourself?'*

The darkness in his gaze was the same grieving fury as the Toma girl he had kicked away. This was not what Jongin had wanted. It was not what he had expected.

But it was too late to go back. The road he had walked had crumbled away behind him, and there was nowhere to go now but forward, no matter how it ended. Just as the peach orchard had been reduced to ashes, so had the dreams of his heart.

He had given up the idea of possessing Jennie. If the spell failed at the wedding, and he could not have her heart, then he would make her a puppet and tie his strings on her.

"...Your Majesty," Count Weddleton began cautiously. "Why are you taking those Tomaris to the palace? They are only worms, crawling about. There is no need to do anything to them."

Jongin gave a short smile.

"The Toma sorcerers will have their hearts torn out."

The count's face turned pale.

"My mother has suffered for lack of power, so as a son I must help her," Jongin explained nonchalantly. But his eyes fell and he took another sip from his wine glass, muttering, "she will become stronger, if she eats more. Strong enough to slay a beast."

The bottle was empty. Jongin slung it away, startling the stunned Count Weddleton out of his seat.

"I'll look...for another bottle of wine in the cellar," he said hastily, but Jongin rose immediately to follow.

"I will go with you. I want to walk for a while."

The door of the drawing room closed behind them, and shadows moved strangely in the space, emerging from the outer dark. It was Liam and Jennie.

"Ahhh..."

Count Weddleton wiped a cold sweat from his brow.

He had spent quite some time with Jongin in the wine cellar, tasting the best of his wines, and had finally persuaded the king to go to one of the guest rooms, where a prostitute was waiting who bore a strong resemblance to Princess Jennie.

It was fortunate he had found her, otherwise he would still be stuck in the wine cellar with Jongin, sweating.

Clutching another bottle of wine, the Count returned to the drawing room to drink a few glasses. It seemed insane to think about sacrificing the Tomaris. Count Weddleton couldn't understand what either Cerdina or his grandson was thinking.

In spite of their blood tie, it had always been difficult for him to handle Jongin. If he was honest, he was afraid of the boy. It was probably because of his mixed Toma blood. Both Cerdina and Jongin were so cruel, it was hard to believe there was any Weddleton blood

in them at all.

Count Weddleton did not have the courage to confront them. If there hadn't been any benefit in it, he would have broken off relations with them completely.

Rising at last to leave, he recoiled in fright.

"Ahhhhhh!"

The count blinked and rubbed his eyes, feeling as if he were seeing a ghost. Before him sat Princess Jennie on the sofa, gracefully upright with her back perfectly straight.

It was not a mistake. That was really her.

Even more shocking, the princess was not alone.

Next to her was a tall man with his arms stretched over the back of the sofa, and his golden eyes fixed on the count.

The king of the barbarians.

Count Weddleton had never been so close to this famous man. The King had seemed fierce even when seen from a distance, and up close it was hard to meet his eyes. Seated comfortably beside the princess, he made the sofa seem small. A single motion of his arms could end Count Weddleton's life.

Gods...

The Count wanted to faint. Alone among the nobility of Estia and everyone in the palace, Count Weddleton still had all his memories. Of course, he knew about the princess's relationship with the barbarians.

He had no idea how much the princess herself remembered, but he was certain of one thing. At one word from Princess Jennie, the barbarian could break his body in an instant.

"It is an honor, why would the Princess visit me at this time of night..." The Count began with a bitter smile.

"Count Weddleton," the princess interrupted. Her expression was cold. "You're the only one still free. It must have been fun."

Her words made his heart freeze. Count Weddleton rubbed suddenly sweaty palms against his pants. He tried to buy time by pretending ignorance.

"I don't know what you're talking about."

Her eyes narrowed. She was behaving differently than she had been. Her purple eyes, which had been lifeless for the last few months, were glittering icily.

"Don't talk nonsense," she said, and went immediately to the subject that he wanted most to ignore. "The only person valuable to the Queen mother is her son."

She paused, to let this sink in.

"You are someone expendable in case something goes wrong." Rising from the sofa, she continued. "You must be aware of the Toma obsession with bloodlines. Would a person who had already abandoned others of his blood not abandon his father, who is not Tomari at all?"

There was no point in trying to argue. Jennie advanced on the Count, who looked as if he had been struck dumb.

"Why does Her Majesty demand the hearts of Tomaris? It is proof that her power has weakened."

The Princess stopped directly before him and leaned closer.

"I have regained my memories," she said. "I broke the spell I was under. It's only a matter of time before everyone else does the same."

"....."

"The Queen Mother is in a dangerous position. She might do anything, if she is backed into a corner."

Count Weddleton shuddered. Jongin had eaten the heart of the



former king to complete a spell. Cerdina would rip out Count Weddleton's heart without hesitation if she thought it necessary, and it wouldn't matter that they were related.

"What do you want?" He asked, defeated.

"I want you to testify that the Queen Mother is a Tomaris."

"And what will I get in return, Princess?"

The princess smiled a little at the question. Though her smile implied it was foolish, the Count couldn't help being distracted by the beauty of her smiling face. It was difficult to take his eyes from her.

"I will save you," she whispered benevolently.

His mouth fell open, and the princess frowned in reproach.

"Don't you think it's generous, considering the evils you have countenanced?" She asked coolly. "A father should take responsibility for the behavior of his daughter."

Jennie did not want this threat to sound empty. So she told Count Weddleton to inquire the next day as to the fate of Seokjin.

Really, she had no idea what was actually going to happen to the man. But it was enough to explain why she thought Liam might have followed and collected him. And once she had explained this, she and Liam left the drawing room together.

"You killed Lady Mirael, didn't you?" Jennie asked him as they walked down a corridor.

It was a guess based on today's events. The massacre of the Tomaris, the Kurkans' intent to kill Seokjin, and the way Liam had listened, collecting information from Jongin and Count Weddleton...

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## Chapter 153

### Chapter 153 — Only You

Lady Mirael lived in a mansion in the capital with many skilled knights as guards, but Liam could have taken her life without difficulty. And at her question, Liam only smiled.

"Do you think I merely killed her?"

Of course not. All the intruders that had planned to assault Jennie that night were likely dead as well. Jennie said nothing.

"You're good at lying," Liam added.

"I had no choice," she replied. It had been a lie to say that Cerdina's power was weakening, and that Jennie had broken the spells she was under. But those lies would have shaken the Count.

"What will you do if he refuses to testify for you?"

"Kill him."

Liam was visibly surprised at her unhesitating answer.

"But he will accept the proposal," she went on thoughtfully. She had not had much interaction with Count Weddleton before, but she had observed him from a distance for some time. He had high status as Cerdina's father, and grandfather of the King.

Count Weddleton did not count for much in his own person. He did not excel. He simply leveraged his influence to accumulate wealth, and he did not risk any shady business dealings. He limited himself to quietly reaping the benefits of his high connections.

In other words, he had done almost nothing but politely beg.

And for one simple reason. He feared his daughter and grandson. He was afraid they would dispose of him if he once stepped out of line.

So he stood back in order to survive.

"And this time, too, he'll choose the option that he thinks will keep him alive," she said. Count Weddleton had no choice, if he wanted to preserve his life for this night.

As they were about to go downstairs, she saw water beading on the windows. It had begun to rain again.

"It's not raining too badly," she said, as Liam followed her eyes to the windows. "I'll go back to the palace tonight."

"No, you won't," Liam said, reprimanding her. "I just told you that you are pregnant. The rain will stop before sunrise. We'll wait here a little longer."

Silently, she nodded. She still couldn't believe she was pregnant, but for now she would play along with him. And it would be nice to wait a little. She was a little overwhelmed by all the information she had learned today. She would prefer not to go back to the palace until she had had time to process it.

Together, they walked through the empty corridors to find an empty guest room to hide in. Liam followed her in silence until suddenly he snatched her and covered her mouth with his hand. Opening a small door at the end of the corridor, he pulled her inside.

It was a broom cupboard. There was barely enough room for the two of them inside, and as soon as he shut the door, it was completely dark.

Jennie stared in the direction of his face as Liam wrapped his arms around her waist. Outside the door, there was a familiar voice.

"Jennie...Jennie!"

Jongin slurred as he cried Jennie's name. He sounded as if he were drunk.

Jennie's body stiffened and her heart beat wildly.

The impulse to run to Jongin immediately was overpowering, and as

Liam looked down at her, her toes curled. She didn't want him to know that she felt this way. Her body was doing this involuntarily.

As she willed Jongin to disappear, there was a woman's voice.

"Your Majesty, I want to be with you..."

The thin door didn't block sound. They could even hear the wet noise of the woman kissing Jongin, and the seductive tone as she spoke.

"Your Majesty, we can't do that out here," she simpered. "Jennie wants to do it in bed..."

The woman was pretending to be Jennie.

Liam bared his teeth at the words and his eyes darkened coldly. Jennie had no idea what to do as the sounds became increasingly explicit.

"Ah, there, hmm....Your Majesty..."

"Jennie...ahh, Jennie..."

The sounds quickly intensified outside the door, and it became clear that Jongin and the woman were having sex in the corridor.

Now Jennie understood why there were no servants wandering the halls of Count Weddleton's mansion.

If there was a chance the King might be doing things like this, they would not be allowed outside.

The loud moans echoed through the silent corridors, and Jennie wanted to cover her ears. It was horrifying to hear another woman pretending to be her while she had sex with Jongin.

"Ah, bitch, squeeze harder, Jennie...!"

Jongin said the vulgar words as he called another woman Jennie's name, and for the first time, she realized what Jongin was feeling. A mixture of love and hate and a deep sense of inferiority, wrapped up in a desire to subdue her. That was all he wanted, to have her under

his control.

"Jennie...hmmm, ahh..."

The sound of his moans made her feel intense revulsion. But there was no time for that to torment her. The louder Jongin got outside, the more ferocious Liam's expression became. He looked furious enough to burst through the door any second, but if they were discovered, there would be no point in threatening the Count. Jennie clutched the hem of his shirt, looking at him pleadingly.

His golden eyes softened a little, but Jongin had no intention of making things easy.

"Ahh, hell Jennie..."

The woman screamed uncontrollably.

"Ahh, more, Your Majesty...come inside Jennie!"

Liam's body trembled, and Jennie stroked his hand.

Sighing, he removed the hand that covered her mouth.

"I've never done anything with Jongin," she whispered. She was worried he might misunderstand, and think that she had had sex with Jongin. Liam only smiled at the explanation.

"I know. If he had treated you that way..." His eyes burned at the door, a look that made it clear that in his mind, he had already ripped out Jongin's throat. "...he wouldn't be alive."

Jennie's lips pursed, and as Liam hugged her tighter, she clung to him. Part of her mind was still attached to Jongin, and the urge to run to him when he called her was still there. But she could bear it, because she was with Liam. Even in the cramped, dark place, his eyes radiated such a bright light.

When she heard the loud moans outside, and the sound of flesh slapping together, Jennie only imagined herself in bed with Liam. She couldn't know the things she had done with him, during that

period she could no longer remember. Right now, she couldn't remember ever having actual intercourse. And all the sex she had seen so far was so disgusting, even the scene going on just outside the door was revolting to her, and all she could do was bear it.

But with Liam, everything was different. She longed to touch him in a way she had never felt before, even when she was obsessed with Jongin. She felt no revulsion or even discomfort when she did sexual things with Liam. It all felt good, and if they actually had sex...

Surely that would be even better.

"What are you thinking?" Liam murmured, his eyes narrowing. "With such a naughty look..."

Jennie hesitated.

"I'm thinking about you," she answered frankly, and slipped her hand around his neck and rose on tiptoe to kiss him. She was the first to press her tongue between his lips, between his sharp teeth, like the teeth of a beast.

Her eyes closed as their tongues stroked together.

She loved it so much that her whole body shuddered with pleasure. She actually had to stifle the moan that almost escaped, lest Jongin discover them on the other side of the door.

But she wanted to do more than this. The desire for him tormented her. She must have become perverted. Jennie licked her wet lips, tasting his saliva.

"I only want to do it with you," she murmured, her voice trembling with nerves. "I don't want anyone else to touch me. Always...only with you."

At that moment, something hot and hard brushed her belly. There was nowhere to go in the narrow broom cupboard. Pressed against Liam without an inch between them, when Jennie looked down, she could see the serpentine bulge of his manhood pressed against her.

Liam was concealing something lethal between his legs. Jennie's jaw

dropped as her eyes slowly lifted to his face.

"It's your fault," he told her, his eyebrows lifting.

Jennie blinked, embarrassed that he was blatantly holding her responsible for his...condition. Outside the door, the hallway was silent. It seemed Jongin and the prostitute had left once they were done.

Liam left the cupboard with Jennie in his arms and headed for the nearest guest room.

The room smelled a bit dusty, but appeared to be clean overall. And Jennie had no time to inspect it in greater detail. Liam shut the door and went straight to the bed, laying her down on top of it.

The sound of raindrops on the window grew louder as the downpour intensified, and Jennie drew a deep breath. There was no sound at all, other than their breathing, and she felt like her heart was about to burst. She couldn't control her excitement, her hands reaching for him. She wanted to touch him.

She tried to pull his shirt off, but Liam caught her hand and lifted it to his lips. As he kissed her fingers, he slid her clothes off with his other hand.

Naked, Jennie sank down on the bed as Liam pushed her thighs apart to lie between them, and she only wrapped her legs around his waist. Unable to resist the proximity of their lips, they kissed again, filled with passion.

Intense kisses. Almost like wild beasts, biting and sucking and licking, driven by instinct. Liam's hands moved all over her body, squeezing and caressing, and Jennie shuddered as he squeezed her breasts and cupped her buttocks. And she couldn't help touching him, filled with desire.

Her body felt so sensitive, the least touch made her moan, and she clung to him. She felt dizzy, almost as if she were drunk.

"Ah, quick... ahh, hmm..."

The tingling inside her was unbearable. Jennie's thighs moved apart, hoping that he would do...something. Soon.

"Jennie..." Liam spoke for the first time, and she loved how he spoke her name, his voice filled with sexual desire. When Jongin said her name like that, it was revolting, but when Liam did it, it only excited her.

He licked his lips. Though he wanted to push himself into her immediately, he was restraining himself.

"It's been a long time since we've done this..." He said. "You can't put it in so soon..."

Catching her thighs in both hands, he lowered his head between them, and his mouth touched her between her legs.

"Ah...!"

Jennie started in surprise that he would do something so incredibly lewd, and her feet pushed nervously at his shoulders as he licked her. Liam looked up, and her request that he do it a little slower went unspoken. As soon as their eyes met, he caught her ankle and licked it.

"I want to make you feel good too..." she said thoughtlessly.

Liam chuckled, his tongue licking her ankle.

"You act so brave because you don't know anything," he said.

"No, I just want us both to enjoy..." She began, and Liam bit her ankle.

"Only being with you makes me happy."

"Me, too."

Remembering the caresses she had seen Jongin receive from his consorts and prostitutes, Jennie reached for Liam, grasping his manhood. He moaned.



"How did you learn all this if you've forgotten everything?" He asked, frowning, and Jennie stroked him, ignoring the question. If she told the truth, that Jongin had forced her to watch while other women did it to him, Liam would have left immediately to tear his head off.

Clicking his tongue, Liam lifted her up.

"If we keep going like this, we are likely to conceive our second child before the first is born," he muttered, and stretched out underneath Jennie, laying her on top of him.

Jennie froze at the sight of his manhood before her, and then had to lift her hips at a sudden burst of pleasure.

"You should do the same," Liam said as he licked at her clit.

Clear liquid beaded at the tip of his penis, and Jennie hesitated a moment and then licked him. His manhood stirred, and she quickly reached for it, startled. Her hand heated immediately.

As she carefully licked it again, she heard a chuckle behind her.

"What are you doing, Jennie? Is that all you can do?" His fingers slid inside her. "You have to make me feel good."

It seemed that her feelings were not reaching him.

Jennie was trying her best, but she wasn't at all sure she could satisfy Liam.

Remembering the things she had seen other women do to Jongin, Jennie tried to move her lips over him, but it was difficult. Liam would not stay still. His fingers slid into her relentlessly and the feel of him licking her clitoris made her face burn as red as a tomato.

She tried to focus on the manhood before her instead of the man behind her, trying to distract her. She had seen Liam's manhood before, but it still seemed just too big for her. It would be hard even to fit it into her mouth. Gathering her courage, she took it deep into her mouth until it touched her uvula, and then sucked so hard, her cheeks drew tight.

"Ahh..." Immediately, Liam let out a rough moan, and Jennie's toes curled. The sound made her feel a strange tingling in her belly. Doing this made Liam feel good, but hearing that moan gave her just as much pleasure. She moaned, muffled around the feel of him in her mouth.

"Ahh... hmm..."

As her thighs trembled, Liam fucks her with his other hand, and suddenly the number of fingers inside her increased to three.

He had exceptionally large hands. She could feel those long, thick fingers pushing against her inner walls, and he wiggled them still deeper, making a wet noise. Jennie could barely keep even his penis in her mouth as she trembled, and her saliva slicked his manhood.

Liam's other hand reached to caress one of her breast as his fingers moved rhythmically inside her.

"You don't plan to keep sucking?" He asked, his voice heated.

Jennie strained to move her head, only to break off again a moment later as he curled his fingers inside her like a hook and rubbed her, sending a shiver through her whole body. Her head tilted back automatically and her teeth caught his manhood.

Liam exhaled sharply.

"Fingers...hmm, ahh..." Jennie pleaded desperately.

"Stop your tongue too...ahh..."

But Liam only licked at her clitoris, pressing it with his tongue even as he caressed her breast. She couldn't control herself, all her strength was leaving her as Jennie slumped onto his belly, his manhood slipping from her mouth. Burying her face in his thighs, Jennie tried to catch her breath, her lips wet with saliva.

She bit him, hard, but there was no mark of her teeth in his skin. When she tried to push herself up, Liam's fingers began to move even faster, as if he had been expecting it, and Jennie moaned as she moved her hips. It was an instinctive attempt to push them away, but

she could not escape.

Again, he reached out to caress one of her breast, and Jennie nearly sobbed.

"Ahh...you keep doing the same thing...hmm....I can't even..."

"What?"

"Hmm...fingers...ahh..."

She wanted to make him feel good, too, but he kept distracting her. She pushed his hand away from her clit

"Don't use your tongue either," she wept. "I want to please you too..."

The instant he stopped, she immediately began sucking on his manhood. Licking the thick veins, she traced the cleft at the tip of his cock with her tongue, and then pushed him all the way to the opening of her throat, touching him against her uvula as she sucked him.

Liam slowly withdrew his fingers, slippery with her clear, viscous fluid.

"I won't be angry, but say it," he said gently, rubbing her clitoris. Jennie stopped moving, and his fingers pressed down lightly on her clitoris. "Where did you learn it?"

"....."

A shudder ran through her body. She pulled his manhood out of her mouth.

"I have never taught you these things," Liam said calmly. "Where did my wife learn this?"

Jennie's lips tightened. She didn't know what to say.

"Explain this, Jennie," Liam said again.

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## Chapter 154

### Chapter 154 — Pleasure

Lies did not work on Liam. He was too perceptive, and Jennie thought if she tried to lie, it would only make trouble between them, and she couldn't think of any plausible excuse anyway. She didn't know what to say.

With her husband's manhood in her hand, Jennie confessed the truth.

"I saw His Majesty having sex with other women."

"...You saw him?"

"Sometimes...he would call me to his room..."

Liam listened as she told him that Jongin had ordered her to sit and watch him have sex with other women. He was silent for some time afterward.

"I'm not angry," he said finally. But he could not hide the emotion thick in his voice. He was holding back, but under the surface, he was seething. She wanted to see his face, but just as the thought to look back surfaced, he spanked her.

"Don't turn your head."

It looked to her like he was very angry. Jennie said nothing. She thought she would try to comfort him somehow, but as she slowly drew him back into her mouth, her eyes suddenly widened. Liam's fingers pushed into her wet interior, and he began to thrust them quickly into her, all the while licking at her clitoris.

Jennie gasped around his manhood in her mouth, the burst of pleasure hazing her vision. Her toes dug into the sheets, wrinkling them, and as the sensations overwhelmed her, she sagged onto him, moaning.

"Ahhhh...!"

Her strength left her and his manhood thrust all the way down her throat. Tears streamed down her cheeks as she gagged, her limbs jerking as she came.

But Liam didn't stop, even though he knew she was climaxing.

Jennie pushed his manhood out of her mouth, her small tongue protruding from her open mouth as she gasped and shuddered above him.

"Ahh, hmm, please, ahh, stop now, ahh..." She pleaded.

But Liam ignored her, pushing his fingers deep inside as his tongue stroked her clitoris over and over. Jennie's eyes widened and every hair on her body prickled as her head fell back involuntarily.

"...Hmm...I can't take it anymore...ahh!" It only took a moment for her to come again. Indescribable pleasure flooded her and her back arched as she moaned loudly.

Jennie had barely regained her senses before Liam turned her over and immediately thrust his manhood deep inside her.

Her vision blurred. Sprawled limply on her belly, she felt Liam's wild breathing coursing hotly down her spine as he caressed her butt0cks in both hands.

Grabbing her waist, he drew his manhood back out of her until only the head was inside and then roughly shoved back into her.

Jennie gasped as she felt her belly bulging.

Terrifying pleasure shot through her body, and though she was afraid, she loved the feeling of being so completely connected with him.

And then she remembered the words she had heard.

—*Ah, bitch, squeeze tighter, Jennie...!*

What if it didn't feel as good to Liam? What if she was the only one enjoying this so much? What if he got bored with her, after he had

had her?

Jongin changed women frequently. As doubts filled her, Jennie tried to tighten herself inside, clenching her inner walls.

"Jennie...! Liam gasped, and leaned down to bite the back of her neck, hard. "Relax..."

But though she was tiring rapidly, Jennie only clenched again, trying to please him. Liam realized there was something strange in her response.

"Jennie," he said again, a clear request for an explanation, and she buried her face in the bed. It was so hard for her to lie to him, and so she mumbled some part of the truth, embarrassed.

"It...shouldn't be...loose..."

Liam laughed bitterly.

"Now I understand..." He said, his tone biting with mockery. "But if a man has to say that, the trouble is he's small."

Liam looked down at Jennie's smooth white back, perfect except for the visible knobs of her spine. He drew a deep breath as his gaze moved up and down her back. Her moist inner walls were gripping his manhood and his jaw muscles tightened as he looked at her and tried to calm himself. The pleasure was overwhelming.

It had always been a problem. Sex with her felt so incredibly good, it made it hard to fight his instincts.

Though he knew it would be difficult for her to endure him, he always pushed her to the limit.

Just looking at her made it difficult to restrain himself. The least encouragement from her made his manhood harden.

More than once, Jennie had risked death, tempting him. It had happened again today, when she looked at him with desire as she spoke to him, and then when they had kissed in the broom closet, Liam couldn't restrain himself any longer.

The beast blood in the veins gave Kurkans strong sexual impulses. He had worried that he might scare her, since she could not remember him, and had decided he would not press her. But after such a long involuntary abstinence, they were finally together, and he would not stop until she lost her mind.

There was also a chance that coming in her until she was overflowing might help her remember, but it would certainly shock her if she knew. Slowly, Ishakan began to move his hips, but then stopped short.

"Jennie...!"

He gripped her backside in his hands. Their size difference was so great, was she having difficulty receiving his manhood?

"Relax..." He said, looking down at her. Her hands were holding the sheet so tightly, her small fists were shaking, and his golden eyes went cold. "Jennie..."

"It...shouldn't be...loose..." She mumbled.

The second he understood what she meant, Liam laughed derisively.

"If a man has to say that, the trouble is he's small."

Her white back shuddered at his words, and he squeezed her backside in his hands as he waited for her to loosen inside. All manner of expletives were spitting through his mind.

He remembered everything he had experienced in bed with her. He was glad that he had been the one to teach the innocent princess, who had known nothing. He had liked watching her change and grow and begin to voice her true desires. And he had been pleased that this change was because of him.

It had been a special relationship that could never be replaced. Or recreated.

But once she had been taken from him, Jongin had taught her so many strange things. Even now, sex with Liam embarrassed her. It made his blood boil to imagine her in Jongin's room, watching him

fuck other women.

Was there a way to kill that bastard that would make him feel better?

Liam didn't think there was anything that would be enough to make his anger go away entirely.

Drawing a deep breath, he tried to calm himself. He had to concentrate on his wife now. Knowing that she was trying her best to make him feel good did dissipate his anger, a little.

Jennie was still hiding her face in the bed, and Liam hugged her, withdrawing his manhood from her. She shuddered at the sensation as his big manhood withdrew, and he turned her over, laying her on her back.

His manhood stroked against her moist lower lips.

"Let's do this face to face," he said, looking down at her. She blushed instantly, and he smiled as he thrust deep inside her, and made her moan loudly.

He caressed her breasts and tried to resist the urge to pound into her instantly. Her breasts fit perfectly in his hands, and he didn't forget to tease her nipples. Only then did he begin to move his hips again.

The sound of their skins colliding together echoed erotically through the room.

"Jennie, Jennie..." He said, calling her name, his voice filled with pleasure. The warmth of her wet insides made him feel so good, and he loved the way she shuddered against him, trying to hold back her moans.

As Jennie's hips began to jerk with cum, it took all of Liam's patience not to be too rough with her.

"Ah, Jennie, ahhhh..."

The sound of his voice moaning her name sent a strange feeling through her. Though she had been absorbed in the sensations he was making her feel, Jennie's eyes opened wide.



"Oh, no, Liam..."

Urgently, she tried to push him away as she felt was about to happen, that silvery, bursting sensation between her legs that embarrassingly meant she was about to squirt. Frantically, she tried to get him to stop, but Liam pretended not to notice. He liked it when she got him wet.

"That's enough, ahh, stop, now, ahhh..."

As she tried to escape, he crushed her beneath his body to keep her from moving. Her breasts flattened against his firm chest and he pinned her wrists down above her head. Their bodies were pressed completely together as he began to move faster, so hard and fast the bed creaked as if it might collapse.

Her mouth absorbed all his attention as he licked the saliva from her lips and rubbed his tongue against hers shamelessly.

Jennie stiffened. Her wet purple eyes went unfocused as her back arched and she shuddered.

"Hmm, ahhhhh..."

Inside, her inner walls tightened and Liam's eyes squeezed shut as she clenched his manhood hard, and then there were the hot liquid bursts against him as she spasmed and squirted again and again.

Slowing, Liam thrust into her as she spasmed, pushing her through her climax.

Afterward, as she came back to her senses, Jennie began to sob. She was wet again, he had made her do it again.

"Hck, hck, ahh..."

Liam thought she was probably embarrassed and caressed her breasts to comfort her. As he plucked at her nipples with his fingers, she began to tremble again.

"I told you to stop..." She sobbed in shame. "Why...why do you keep doing it...hck..."

She had done this several times before because of Liam, but she wouldn't remember it. Liam couldn't help smiling. She always misunderstood what happened, and thought that he had made her wet the bed.

Infuriated, Jennie punched him in the chest when he smiled, and then again since her reactions seemed to amuse him so. But striking him with a closed fist didn't even tickle him, and her lips tightened.

"Ouch," Liam said belatedly, pretending to be injured which only infuriated her more. It was so cute, he couldn't resist biting her, gentle bites on her cheek that left no marks. "My wife is strong."

"Liam, you really are so...!" she said, her voice quavering with a sob of frustration that she couldn't express herself. As much as he wanted to keep teasing her, Liam didn't want to actually make her angry. He stroked her silver hair.

"I'm sorry. Did you get scared?" He asked softly, and bent his head to lick her tearstained cheeks, and then her earlobe, and then her slightly chapped lips, whispering. "I'll be gentler."

Jennie blinked wet lashes. Her tear-filled eyes looked like flowers in the rain, and Liam looked down at her, enchanted. Filled with emotions, her eyes took on such a captivating hue.

In the beginning, she had always been expressionless, and radiated a sober atmosphere.

But now she sometimes let her walls down to show him her true feelings.

It moved him so much, it made it hard for Liam to be rational.

She was so beautiful, people would not let her alone.

Of course, Liam was one of those people, and he tormented her often.

"I'll be as gentle as you want..."

The difference was that he wanted to make her happy. He didn't care if the road was difficult. He wanted to give her the most perfect

happiness.

Liam kissed her wet eyes. His voice was filled with love, as if every word was a confession of his passion for her.

"Don't cry, Jennie."

True to his word, Liam was very gentle. And Jennie realized that she had been mistaken. Even when he was not being rough, the intensity of the climaxed she felt was hard to bear.

His eyes were on her every moment as he gently rolled his hips into her, watching her every reaction, whispering her name over and over. Just the sound of his deep voice saying her name made her tremble a little.

And when he came inside her, she climaxed again, hearing Liam's rough moans as his manhood filled her and his semen spread deep inside her. The sex was overwhelming.

Their sex was like swimming in honey. Afterward, as they lay cuddling together, Jennie let out a soft moan of satisfaction. With her arms around him, she breathed deeply. It was natural, even reflexive to kiss as they lay facing each other, their sweaty bodies pressed together.

This is really about having sex, Jennie thought as their lips rubbed softly together. Feeling good about each other, sharing emotions, being completely connected to each other...

The things she had seen in Jongin's bed were entirely devoid of love. That had simply been satisfying carnal desire.

Liam stretched out on his back, laying Jennie on his chest and gently caressed her with one hand. And the fingers of his other hand moved between her legs, pushing his semen back into her as it flowed out between her thighs.

Suddenly, his eyes were restless.

"I don't think I can do it anymore..." Jennie said in fright, when she realized what he was thinking.

There was no strength in her voice, and he withdrew his fingers from inside her, slowly stroking her swollen clitoris instead. He licked his lips.

Jennie's silver hair cascaded around her like a waterfall as she sat up, fleeing those tormenting fingers.

"I should go back to the palace..." She said hesitantly.

Liam only kissed a lock of hair tangled in his fingers and pulled her back down by her waist, laying her on the bed beside him. His limbs tangled with hers.

"Don't go," he said.

She didn't want to go, either. She wanted to sleep sweetly in his arms, and really rest. But she had to return to the palace. When she didn't answer, he frowned.

"I have made a mistake," he said. "I should have done it until you fainted."

Jennie buried her face in his chest. Even if he said such things, she knew he would take her back in time.

"I have a question," she said suddenly, raising her head to look up at him. "The spells were what made me fall in love with His Majesty, weren't they?"

In her memories, there had definitely been a time when Jongin had been kind and affectionate to her.

"In the past, he was kind, before. Couldn't it be that His Majesty also changed because he is under a spell?"

Liam's face was expressionless.

"That bastard has always been scum. You'll understand when you remember."

Jennie's eyes dropped. He was assuming that she would, as if it were certain that she would regain her lost memories. But there was so

little time left, it seemed unlikely that she could. Anxiety filled her.

If she never recovered her memories, she would never understand any of it.

"I think about it, sometimes," she whispered, looking up at him with worried, somber eyes. "About what I used to be like...I must have been very bold."

Liam's head tilted, near enough that their lips nearly brushed.

"You tried very hard. Just like now." His smile was soft. He kissed her forehead. "Why don't you sleep before you go back?"

As soon as he said it, drowsiness overcame her. It was impossible to keep her eyes open. Jennie drifted off to sleep.

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## Chapter 155

### Chapter 155 — Iron Door

*Once again, Jennie stood in a vast desert.*

*The landscape of golden sand was so familiar, and the heat of the sun was intense, but she didn't feel hot. That was because she was in a dream.*

*Jennie walked, leaving a trail of footprints through the fine sand. Some time passed before she stopped.*

*There was something dark heaped on the horizon.*

*It was the chains.*

*Automatically, her body stiffened. But atop the chains sat a small silver figure, and she rushed toward it. It was the baby wolf, sitting on top of the chains, and Jennie let out a sigh of relief when she saw that the cub was unharmed. The pup even wagged his tail at her approach, lifting his little chin proudly as he batted the chains with his forepaws.*

*"Did you do all this?" She asked.*

*He nodded his head, eager to show off his trophy, as if he wanted to boast about how difficult the hunt had been and how he had killed it. Her heart swelled, watching the adorable little baby wolf.*

*She wanted to hug him. But she couldn't just snatch him up; what if the cub didn't like her? Gently, she offered her hand, and the little cub stood up on his hind legs and held out his front paws, as if asking to be picked up.*

*And then Jennie was holding the little wolf in her arms. Stroking his silver fur, which was the same color as her hair. Silver hair was unusual; it was practically the symbol of the legitimacy of the royal family of Estia. And not only was it the first time she had seen a wolf with silver fur like this, he also had golden eyes.*

*As she stroked his soft fur, she gazed into his eyes, and the moment they looked at each other, the little wolf's jaws parted and his golden eyes*

*warmed, just like Liam's.*

*The baby wolf had fought alone in this place for so long, but there was no sign of resentment in his canine smile, only affection.*

*"Mama!" The little wolf said.*

*Jennie was struck dumb. Frozen as the wolf cub cocked his head to one side, innocently puzzled that she didn't respond. She remembered what Liam had said, he had told her she was pregnant, and she had been surprised, but she hadn't...felt anything. It was as if it had been news about someone else, such a thing could have no bearing on her.*

*But hearing the baby wolf call her mother...*

*It stuck in her heart.*

*She had always wanted to protect this baby, without even knowing why. She had cared so much, she had asked Liam to help her with a dream. Why was she trying so hard?*

*She was holding the answer to that question in her arms, the truth at last revealed.*

*"Baby..." She whispered.*

*A gust of wind blew, sand bursting upward, a sandstorm that made her shut her eyes tight. When she opened again, everything was dark, and the iron door stood before her. An iron door wrapped in chains, locked with a lock that had no key.*

*Blankly, Jennie stared at it.*

*Her teeth gritted. And she rushed at the door, furious, tearing at it like a madwoman, yanking at the chains and pounding on the iron door with all her strength.*

*"Open up!!!" She screamed. "Open right now!!!!!"*

*This was to blame for everything. If only it would open, if only she could open it...*

*Tears poured down her cheeks as rage filled her. The thought of everything her baby had suffered tore her heart to pieces. She had known nothing. She sagged against the iron door, and something yanked at the hem of her dress.*

*When she looked down, she saw the little wolf had followed her, and she swiped away her tears quickly.*

*Jennie stooped, bending to pick up her baby again and hug him, but the little wolf stepped away, licking at her reddened hands.*

*"What if I can't do it?" She asked softly, and the little wolf patted her foot with his right paw and made her laugh through her tears. The darling was trying to comfort her.*

*Looking at her face, the little wolf suddenly threw back his head and howled. A beam of light fell into that dark place, shining on the wolf cub and enveloping it.*

*".....!"*

*Jennie gasped as the wolf cub suddenly grew, no longer a vulnerable baby but a huge silver wolf the size of a large house. He howled again, deafening, and goosebumps rose on her skin.*

*The wolf rushed at the iron door, his sharp teeth tearing at the chain that Jennie had been unable to move, even with all her strength.*

*With a metallic snap, the chain broke.*

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## Chapter 156

### Chapter 156 - Fragments

Jennie awoke from her sleep as if she had been ejected, clutching her head in her hands. Nausea gripped her.

The headache was so bad, it felt as if her skull were shattering. As if someone had smashed it with a hammer. But even through the agony, Jennie tried to grasp the fragments of memories whirling through her mind.

*-Take me as your wife.*

There was a peony garden. She clearly remembered the moment she had plucked up her courage to confess her love to Jongin. But this time it was different. Another man stood before her, holding a peony in his hand.

*-Really...you're very capricious...*

The man's voice faded. His figure blurred. But one thing was clear, and that was Jennie's smile, and the happy smile of the man before her. His voice sounded the sweetest in the world to her as he spoke.

*-My fiancée...*

The memory didn't last long, and faded quickly.

In a cold sweat, Jennie pushed back the damp hair clinging to her forehead. When she tried to summon those memories again, it only intensified her headache. Closing her eyes, she tried to breathe deeply. She still felt nauseous.

Hadn't she confessed to Jongin?

Not only had she lost her real memories, but false ones had taken their place. How long had her memories been distorted? She couldn't believe in...anything.

But she did know for sure who she had really confessed her love to in

the peony garden.

Liam had been so furious when she said she had confessed to Jongin.

Jennie covered her face with her hands. Even after she regained her memories, it would take a very long time to make amends for her mistakes.

Sitting up in the bed, Jennie realized she was still in Count Weddleton's mansion, and Liam was nowhere to be seen. And there was still the sound of rain pouring outside, pounding against the windows. She had thought it would stop soon, but it was only getting worse.

Though the rain and dark clouds made it hard to tell, she thought it might be close to sunrise. Jennie peered out into the darkness.

There was nothing to see there. It seemed like a darkness without end. But at some point soon, the sun would rise.

Jennie laid a hand on her abdomen, feeling the slight roundness to her once-flat belly. It hadn't been very noticeable, so she had ignored it until now. She had just thought she was gaining weight.

Vividly, she remembered the scene from her dream.

That little wolf cub with golden eyes had grown to the size of a house and then rushed at the iron gate.

How could she not have noticed it until now?

Anyone who saw the golden-eyed cub would know it was that man's child.

Jennie sighed. Her mind was in chaos, excited, happy, scared, overwhelmed...and so sad. She couldn't even enjoy learning of her baby because she felt so incomplete. Only a child with a bad mother would suffer so many hardships before it was even born. If only he had come a little later, when it was safe...

But in her mind, she pictured herself with Liam, holding their son.

She would finally have a family.

She was feeling strange things. For a long time, she sat with her hand on her belly, and only started and turned her head at the sound of the doorknob rattling.

"...Jennie?"

Pushing the door open, Liam entered with a pile of clothes in his hands. He looked surprised to see that she was awake. She had the impression that he had planned to secretly move her back to the palace after he had dressed her.

She was only naked because he had torn all her clothes off.

But Jennie didn't care if she was naked. Sliding out of bed, she approached him on wobbly legs and rose onto her tiptoes, wrapping her arms around his neck to hug him. Stiffly, Liam bent to embrace her, and she felt the warmth of his clothes against her snow white skin.

"Did you have a nightmare?" He asked.

Jennie gazed into his eyes, the golden eyes that so perfectly matched his title. King of the Desert.

As the silence stretched, he lifted an eyebrow.

"Or do you want to do it again? In that case, you'll be late."

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## Chapter 157

### Chapter 157 - Problems with her Power

Liam glanced out the window, squinting his eyes as if he were calculating the exact time, and then looked back at Jennie.

"It doesn't matter to me if you're late, but it might be a problem for the Princess." He said it in a joking tone, but there was an underlying seriousness. Jennie stroked his hair just as she had the baby wolf's fur in her dream, and he smiled.

"Why do you kill the Toma?" Jennie asked softly, lifting her eyebrows.

"For getting in my way," he said simply.

"Would you spare the lives of innocent Tomaris?"

"As many as you want."

Jennie reflected for a moment.

"I have something to do," she said quietly.

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The usually noisy palace of the Queen Mother had been quiet. The habits of its mistress had changed.

She did not invite any men, nor did she have Tomaris in and out acting as servants. In all the silent, seemingly empty palace, there were only gloomy ladies-in-waiting wandering the halls.

Cerdina gasped. Her whole body was drenched with blood, and the smoke billowing from her body only disappeared for a moment.

She gazed ahead with eyes filled with madness, surrounded by black animals on the floor. Dragging a ram to the center of her magic pattern, she cut off the head of the sixty-sixth sacrifice, pouring its

blood onto the floor.

She had painted the pattern with her own blood, and it absorbed every drop of blood from the sacrifice, but remained unchanged. She couldn't get the smoke wafting from her body to disappear completely.

Cursing, Cerdina threw her dagger to the floor, chewing on her bloody fingernails.

After she had eaten the hearts of several Tomaris, Cerdina had remained locked in her palace, struggling with a problem she could not solve. Her power grew ever greater, but she had no control over it at all. Like a glass filled to the brim with water, every ripple made it overflow.

The wild, uncontrollable power made her feel as if she were losing her mind, as if she had crossed some line beyond her limits.

Just as she was reaching for another offering, Jongin appeared.

"Mother."

Her son rarely took the initiative to visit her. Cerdina's eyes widened.

"Jongin...my son, my King!"

Dragging the hem of her blood-soaked robe out of the way, she approached, but unlike his excited mother, Jongin was cold and emotionless.

"I have brought you a gift," he said, dragging a bound man toward her. The man was trying to scream around the gag in his mouth, shaking his head frantically.

The corners of Cerdina's mouth lifted.

"A Tomaris."

She could hear the man's heart pounding. Jongin kicked the man toward her coldly, pushing the man inside the boundaries of the pattern of magic.

"Aren't you supposed to get stronger?"

Jongin knew that she was suffering because she had lost control of her powers, and so he had brought her this new offering. Not another corpse, but a living man that shared her blood.

Picking up the dagger from the floor, he placed it into her hand and smiled as her slender hand gripped it firmly.

"I have always been proud. So I hope my mother will be proud of me as well."

Cerdina's answering smile was devious. She didn't know what had made Jongin begin behaving this way. He was even trying to control her. But though she wasn't accustomed to it, she was glad of this change. She was the one who had nurtured this monster.

"Of course, it's all because of you...my son, Jongin..."

She caught his face between her gory hands, smearing his white skin with the blood.

"You will never betray your mother," she whispered.

Jongin did not answer. He only smiled.

"Your Majesty. Queen Mother." The head lady-in-waiting appeared, opening the door a crack. "You have received a request for a visit."

"I thought I said I wouldn't meet with anyone!" Cerdina shouted, glowering.

"It's just that..." The woman pressed on anxiously.

"The request was made by the Princess."

\*\*\*

An hour later, Cerdina went to the audience chamber, dressed in an elegant gown. She had washed away the blood staining her body, and temporarily suppressed the black smoke that wafted ceaselessly from her. She could control it long enough to share a cup of tea, at least.

"It has been a while, Jennie."

Jennie rose from her couch to bow as Cerdina entered the chamber, and the Queen Mother's eyes went over her, smiling as she observed every detail.

Jennie's eyes were calm, and when Cerdina looked into them, she had the strong impulse to rip her to pieces.

Jennie had been born with the silver hair of the royal family of Estia, and the purple eyes that so impressed the nobility. Her royal lineage was perfect. She was born a princess with the noble blood that Cerdina had always envied.

But none of that mattered now. The noble princess was nothing but a doll in Cerdina's hands. Cerdina took great satisfaction in making the princess dance on her strings. And she would keep on dancing, for as long as Cerdina wanted.

The two women faced each other on opposite couches, sipping the tea served by the maids. In the audience chamber, the only sound was the clack of teacups and click of small spoons.

Cerdina was first to break the silence. She took a single, elegant sip of tea and set her cup down.

"I'm surprised," she said. "You came on your own initiative."

Mirroring Cerdina's motion, Jennie set her own cup down, and when Cerdina glanced at the cup, she found that the level of the liquid had not decreased.

Cerdina smiled.

"Is something wrong, Jennie?"

"I haven't seen you lately," Jennie replied. "I was worried that you might be ill."

Both of them knew this was not the reason for her visit. Even after she had lost her memory, Jennie still feared Cerdina. Though Cerdina had only left her with memories of affection, Jennie instinctively

avoided her.

That had made Cerdina very happy. For Jongin's sake, she pretended to be a friendly stepmother, but she didn't want Jennie to dare to step out of her place.

So it was very strange that Jennie had chosen to come and visit on her own. It was unusual behavior, and Cerdina watched her carefully. Jennie was still under the spell, though it had weakened a bit, most likely because she had been among the barbarians.

But Jennie was still in love with Jongin.

The knowledge that the spell was incomplete made Cerdina feel...thirsty. The spell had failed to change Jennie's feelings completely. It had only distorted her memories.

It was due to Cerdina's own lack of power.

Another sip of tea did not calm her. Feeling that new weakness in the spell gave her the urge to tear the girl apart, before she could rebel for even a moment.

"How is Countess Melissa?" Cerdina asked affectionately. "You must take care of good servants, as she has been taking care of you since you were a child."

The words were couched as kind advice, with an underlying cruelty. Jennie understood the message perfectly, and darkness flashed through her face.

"...Yes."

The dutiful response made Cerdina smirk. But the words that followed wiped it away.

"That's why I didn't run away."

"....."

Cerdina carefully wiped all expression from her face as she met Jennie's eyes, but this time, the princess didn't look away. Even a few



days ago, she wouldn't have dared to look the Queen Mother in the eye.

Those beautiful purple eyes were still filled with fear, but Cerdina saw something new in them. A sense of desperate courage, driven to action because she had been pushed to the brink.

How had this girl changed so much? Cerdina had been abusing her since Jennie was little, ensuring that Jennie would be too frightened to dare a single thought of rebellion. What had changed?

Cerdina's mouth twisted into a smile, and Jennie, unfazed, leaned over to place a small glass bottle filled with tea leaves onto the table. She nudged it nearer to Cerdina with her fingers.

"It's herbal tea," Jennie said. "I went to some trouble to get it. It will be good for the Queen Mother's health. I wanted to show my gratitude for the tea you gave me. It was very beneficial."

Jennie smiled slightly.

"Shouldn't one return what one has been given?"

Cerdina looked at Jennie in horror. And having delivered her message, and done what she had come to do, Jennie stood and politely ended their meeting.

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## Chapter 158

### Chapter 158 - Flashback

Jennie departed, leaving Cerdina alone to stare at the tea leaves in the glass bottle on the table in silence.

With a sudden burst of laughter, Cerdina slapped at the bottle, shattering it on the floor in an explosion of tea leaves and glass shards.

That bitch was in the palm of her hand. With a single spell, Cerdina could have Jennie on the floor, begging for her life. She wanted to chase after her and drag her back by her hair.

But she couldn't do the things she wanted to do. She had to overlook this insolence because of Jongin.

Cerdina rose from the couch.

A night with white moonlight came to her memory, and Cerdina sighed deeply at the vision of dozens of decapitated heads, strewn on a bedroom floor.

Jongin was right. She needed more power. She felt an instinctive revulsion when he brought her her own people to devour, sacrificed alive, but it was the only way. She would accumulate more power first, and once she had defeated her enemies, then she would worry about controlling it.

The whole world would be in her hands once she was reborn. A perfect god...

Gradually, her fury subsided. Instead of chasing after Jennie, she returned to her room, which still reeked of blood.

But as soon as she saw her magic pattern in her room, her eyes widened.

The Tomaris she had left lying on the pattern was gone.

\*\*\*

Jennie's ladies-in-waiting followed her back from Cerdina's palace. As soon as they reached the gardens of the Princess Palace, she stopped and turned back.

"I want to walk alone for a while," she said. "You may go inside."

As she watched them go, she walked slowly through the garden, only speeding her steps when she was certain they were gone. Faster and faster she went, until she was running. She had asked Liam to wait to save the Toma until after they had been taken to Cerdina's palace, and hoped he had succeeded.

There was a good reason for not rescuing them earlier. She wanted them to see what Cerdina was doing. There were still many Tomaris that supported her, but all of the Toma would be horrified to learn that Cerdina was eating her own people.

Hopefully, it would persuade them to stop supporting her.

At that moment, the Kurkans were probably carrying the Tomaris away from Cerdina's rooms. They had said they knew all of the secret passages in the palace.

*"How do you know about secret passages I don't even know about?" She had asked Liam. He had smiled slightly.*

*"Because you told me."*

What kind of person had she been, to know all the secret passages in the palace? Jennie flew through the garden, running as fast as she could go, wondering about herself and too impatient to pretend otherwise.

And impatient to see Liam.

They had agreed to meet after her encounter with Cerdina, to tell each other what had happened, but she was more interested in seeing Liam than anything else. Just exchanging a few words with him would help her endure another day in the palace.

".....!"

Jennie lurched to a stop as her vision suddenly blurred and sent her suddenly sprawling onto the grass. She gasped, trying to catch her breath, and squeezed her eyes shut against a sudden headache.

The fragment of memory was like a splinter in her mind.

She was running in her memory, too. Running desperately through darkened corridors, but in her memory, she was not alone. Behind her was a thin, battered boy, laboriously trying to keep up with her until he suddenly stumbled and fell with a thump.

She turned back instantly to help him, but he got up, refusing her hand.

*I can keep going*, he said, his cold golden eyes glowing in the darkness as he looked at her. *I am not a burden. Run.*

She was not strong enough to carry him while she ran, anyway. There was no choice but to go, leading the way, with the boy behind her enduring his pain in silence.

That was where the memory ended.

"...Ah."

Unconsciously, she sighed with regret. That memory was completely different from the others. She had seemed much younger. As she waited for the excruciating headache to fade, Jennie suddenly wondered.

Did I ever meet Liam when I was young?

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## Chapter 159

### Chapter 159 - Confrontation

Pondering the memory, Jennie was certain that that boy had been Liam. Though of course, he had been completely different as a boy.

The Liam she knew was always relaxed, a characteristic of the truly powerful. He was never rushed, never angry, and she could never remember him yelling once, unless it was something related to her.

But that boy had been a ferocious little stranger, thin of build and delicate in appearance. It was a sharp contrast to his powerful adult body, almost like a beast in his vitality. But his eyes were the same.

Their coldness, and that mysterious, glowing gold was unforgettable.

If she had met Liam back then, she certainly should have remembered him. The only way she would have lost that memory would have been to some spell.

Of all the memories that had sprung up in her mind, this memory made her feel particularly...strange.

Jennie adjusted her disheveled clothing as she waited for her headache to go away. She couldn't waste anymore time. Liam was waiting for her.

And anyway, she didn't think she would solve the puzzle just by thinking about it. It would be something else to discuss with him. But as soon as she tried to rise, her legs wobbled under her and nearly sent her sprawling again.

Someone caught her before she could fall and Jennie turned back with a smile, expecting Liam.

And then she immediately yanked away, trying to break free of the grip.

The man's hand followed her, an increasing and unpleasant pressure on her skin. Blue eyes looked down at her.

"Please let go, Your Majesty," she said calmly.

But Jongin only gripped tighter.

"Where are you going?"

"Your body is weak. Obey me and return to the palace."

Jennie only stared at him silently, and Jongin's smile was knowing.

"And it looks as if you're going to meet the barbarian. If I let you alone, you'll spread your legs for him, won't you?"

How could he say such crude things? Jennie didn't understand it. The words stung her like needles, and if anything, it seemed to her that he was frustrated he couldn't physically hurt her. Yanking on her arm, he pulled her before him, and his head bent inches from hers.

"You should not be unaware of how an impure bride is treated," he warned, low, as his gaze swept over her body. "I would have saved you from Seokjin, if you had given me a little..."

He looked at her coldly.

"Ungrateful bitch."

The words were like a dagger to her heart, and all Jennie could do was laugh bitterly inside. How long had she believed that the way Jongin treated her was the way a man was supposed to treat a woman? All this time, she thought if she loved Jongin, then she should act as he wished.

Now she knew the truth. Jongin had used her love against her, to manipulate and mistreat her.

When she had sex with Liam, she felt connected to him. He had never forced Jennie to do things she didn't like, and he cared that she felt good. He even held himself back for her sake. He had never abused her if she didn't know how to do something well, or did it poorly.

Nor did he have sex with other women in front of her, and tell her it

was her fault because she couldn't fuck him herself. Liam never blamed her for anything.

Jennie shuddered. Her heart was pounding so fast as all the contradictions rose in her mind, and the sickening surety that she must get down on her knees and beg Jongin's forgiveness filled her, threatening to conquer her.

Automatically, one hand went to her belly, and the thought of the life there made her quickly remove it.

Her hands clenched into fists so tight, her nails bit into her palms.

"...if that's the case," she said quietly, "then Your Majesty also acted indecently."

Every day, he had a woman in his room. Sometimes more than one, sometimes he had multiple women at the same time, to satisfy his desires. It was ridiculous for him to criticize her, when he treated women like replaceable objects.

"If you don't want an impure bride, then you may cancel our engagement," she said firmly. "If it is purity Your Majesty wants, there is none left."

At her words, Jongin burst out laughing.

"Hahaha...damn..."

Jennie didn't flinch at his mockery.

"Did you ever have any sincere feelings for me?" She asked.

For the first time, his eyes wavered. He couldn't answer. In tense silence, they looked at one another, and she watched the storm arise in his eyes, a flood of emotions that rose in a tide to devour him.

And suddenly, he smiled.

"I like you, Jennie," he whispered, with an abrupt sweetness that was jarring. His hand stroked her hair. "From the first moment we met, until now..."

It sounded like a sincere confession. Immediately contradicted by what he did next.

"So you should have been obedient." His fingers twisted in her hair and yanked, wrenching her head back. "It's your fault everything's a mess!"

He flung her to the ground, his teeth bared, his hate and rage exploding. Jennie was terrified as he moved between her thighs, yanking her clothing away with a noise of tearing cloth. In the full light of day, she wrestled with him, fighting to shove him away.

"No, get off me, don't touch me!"

Jennie raked his arms with her nails, to no effect.

She slapped his face so hard, his head rocked to one side.

Slowly, he turned to face her again, staring at her in silent menace as she reached to cover her exposed undergarments with torn cloth.

"Don't pretend, you're not even pure," he said coldly.

As if she were an object, not the person he loved.

"Wasn't I a fool to care for you?"

"You never cared about me," she retorted.

"Shut up!!!" Jongin shouted furiously, and then his expression shifted again, a sweet smile that was more frightening than insanity. Gently, he tugged at her stiff wrist. "Jennie, you love me."

His voice was forgiving as he caressed her.

"That savage has confused you a little, that's all."

Jennie's other hand pressed painfully to her chest.

Every kind word made her heart react, a painful squeezing that was so upsetting. Faintly, she could hear the rattling of chains, all but



forgotten.

"Tell me that you love me," Jongin whispered. "Then I will be kind to you..."

Those chains were forged from her false feelings.

Her heart was beating so fast, and she didn't want it to, and Jennie thought of golden eyes. Her excitement was for the man she truly loved. Her lips parted.

"I..."

The sound of chains paused.

You can do it, you can do it...

Jennie drew a deep breath, and when she spoke, she heard a snapping inside her mind.

"I don't love you." She said it without hesitation. It didn't matter if her heart was racing, it didn't matter if deafening screams rose inside her mind, she forced the words out stubbornly. "Even if I were born all over again, I would never love you."

Jongin stared at her in shock.

And then he smiled.

"If only you had obeyed," he said. "I wouldn't need to make you a doll..."

There was no sanity in his eyes as he gently caressed her cheek.

"You really are so stupid...urgh!"

Suddenly the weight moved off her body and Jongin floated for a moment, struggling, before he was violently thrown away, crashing into the garden. And the person she had longed for most was there instead, appearing above her.

"Tell me you love me, Jennie." Liam smiled, his golden eyes bright.

"And then I will kiss you."

Her heart was pounding, but this time it wasn't because of any forced feelings. When Liam extended his hand to her, she froze. Her whole body was paralyzed by what had just happened, and she looked at his hand dumbly, unable to take it. Too nervous to reach out.

"Quickly," Liam said, an infinitely gentle command, and when she obeyed, he pulled her hard against him, his arm tight about her waist. "Hurry, hurry."

Her lips trembled. This man was so impatient, he couldn't wait another moment to hear it, the thing he had been waiting for for so long.

"...I love you," she told him, and watched joy fill his golden eyes, a joy as dazzling as the sun. Her hand lifted to touch his face, wondering. "Did I ever tell you that?"

Surely she must have. She must have told it to him dozens of times a day in those memories she had lost, so often that he was exhausted, hearing it.

"No," he said unexpectedly. He bit her lip. "That is the first time."

"Really?"

"Yes. You never said it before."

His mouth moved closer to hers and Jennie parted her lips to let his tongue move between them, feeling as if her whole body was scorched by that heat.

Clinging to him, she forgot everything but Liam.

"Say it again..." He whispered as he kissed her, filled with passion. "Again, say it again."

She said it again. She would say anything he wanted, but there was no end to his appetite for this. *I love you*, she whispered, and the more she whispered, the more he told her to say it again, and again.

Every time their lips parted, *I love you*. Every kiss, *I love you*. Countless kisses and countless times she said the words, *I love you, I love you, I love you*.

This moment was so sweet, it must be an illusion. It could not be real. Jennie felt as if she were drifting in a dream, until shouts snapped her out of it.

"Jennie!"

Nearby, Jongin staggered to his feet, and shouted again.

"Jennie! Jennie!!!"

The sound of his voice was eerie and unhinged as he screamed her name, and only stopped when she finally turned to look at him. Liam's head turned to look at him only when she did.

For a long moment, the two men stared at each other, their gazes locked and taut with tension. In his madness and injury, Jongin had forgotten to be afraid, and he did not look as if he would back down.

Pushing Jennie behind him, Liam strode toward Jongin, whose eyes took on a wild light as the distance between them shrank.

"Am I not permitted here?" Liam smiled at the other man. "Didn't you invite me as your guest?"

It was Jongin who had invited the Kurkans to the wedding. He had been pleased to provoke them. And this was where that pride had led him, to this pathetic end. Even the spell they thought so perfect was breaking apart.

But Jongin would not admit defeat even when it was staring him in the face.

"You act as if you've loved her a thousand years when you've only just met her, disgusting bastard!"

He shouted. His eyes were bloodshot. "You're just like that bastard, Seokjin! You just want to fuck the Princess of Estia!"

Liam looked as if he were listening with great interest.

"So what's the difference between you and me?" He inquired.

"I've been with her all our lives," Jongin answered immediately.

Liam laughed, loud and long. And then he stopped.

The humor drained away and his face hardened, and the air around him crackled with a cold, lethal energy.

Jennie knew that expression. He had been wearing it as he walked through a dark alley filled with corpses.

If he wanted to, he could snap Jongin's neck in an instant.

But instead, he turned his golden gaze to Jennie, and Jongin frowned as he followed Liam's eyes to her belly.

Liam held Jennie tight, one arm about her back and the other pulling her hips against him.

"I'll kill him later," he whispered affectionately in her ear. "There's no need to do it in front of you."

Jongin's eyes bulged as Liam pointedly ignored him, as if he were an insect unworthy of his notice.

"You think I'll leave you alone?" He shouted, enraged, and Liam's head swung toward him.

"You seem so eager to die. There's no need for it," he explained. "I've thought of a better punishment for you."

He paused to let the weight of the words sink in.

"Wait until the final moment arrives."

\*\*\*

Cerdina immediately headed for Jennie's palace. She wanted to pull that damned bitch's hair out. The slut needed educating, and Cerdina didn't care if overusing her power destroyed her in the process.

She would show her what it meant to obey. When she was done with her, Jennie would never dare to act so arrogant again.

Cerdina still couldn't believe that Jennie had actually dared to defy her.

Thinking of the moment when Jennie gave her that glass bottle, Cerdina walked faster. But before she even left her own palace, she staggered to a halt in the middle of the corridor. She had to bite back a scream.

".....!"

Collapsing to the floor, she wrapped trembling arms around herself, retching as she raked at her chest with her own fingernails. She gagged again and again, choked, suffocating, and finally vomited up black blood onto the white marble floor.

Slowly, she swiped the blood away with the back of her hand.

"It can't be..." She muttered dizzily.

Part of the spell had just broken. Jennie had lost her love for Jongin.

Why did it break? How did she do it?

Spells that implanted feelings were very complicated. Cerdina had had to alter Jennie's memories to make her love Jongin, replacing that desert savage with her son. Every time Jennie looked at Jongin, she felt the same feelings she had for Liam.

But Jennie was breaking through. She had only freed her emotions for now, but it was very likely that the memories tied so tightly to them would follow soon.

Cerdina hadn't been able to give the spell the attention it needed lately, since she had been having such difficulty controlling her power.

It was still an insidious spell. It would not be easily broken. In this time, there was no sorcerer who could surpass Cerdina. Perhaps before, some barbarian sorceress might have challenged her, but she

knew there was no one alive that should be able to rival her. But then...

How had the spell been broken?

It was impossible. Bewildered, Cerdina continued toward the princess's palace, but the rage that had sustained her was gone. And on the way, she encountered someone else.

"Jongin..." She whispered. He stood alone in the garden outside Jennie's palace, and her heart contracted to see her son in such a pitiful state.

"They...did this to you?"

He did not seem to hear her, and she grabbed his shoulder and shook him.

"Jongin, tell me what happened?" She shrieked. "Tell me!"

Jongin said nothing. He did not even look at her as she shook him, and then he finally slapped her hand away painfully. The back of her hand reddened.

She did not care. All her attention was focused on him, with no care for herself.

"Jongin..." She pleaded desperately. "Please, tell your mother..."

"I won't wait til the wedding," he said, turning his gaze toward her slowly. He could see himself reflected in her eyes, in their endless greed.

Jongin had despised her. All this time, he had thought he was different from Cerdina, better than his mother, but their kinship could not be denied.

He was just like her, after all.

"I no longer care about her heart. Her body is enough," he said, and gave the order. "Make her my doll. Right now."



## Chapter 160

### Chapter 160 - Clarifications

Carrying Jennie in his arms, Liam walked to the place where the other Kurkans were waiting. There was no hesitation as they left the palace. There was no need even to speak. Lying quietly in his arms, Jennie rested her head on his chest and listened to the strong beat of his heart.

She only came to her senses when he finally came to a halt in front of an old inn near the city center that felt strangely familiar. Many Kurkans were waiting there, and though Liam had covered her torn clothing with a robe, she shrank automatically before the dozens of eyes.

At a wave of Liam's hand, all of the waiting Kurkans lowered their heads.

They surely meant no harm; they were only curious.

But none of them said a word or lifted their eyes as Liam passed them and climbed the stairs.

When he made his way to the room at the end of the corridor, it also felt oddly familiar, and as soon as he set her down, he helped her change clothes. The comfortable Kurkan-style nightgown was loose over the slight roundness of her belly.

"I still haven't recovered my memories," she told him.

"I know."

Taking her hand, he stroked it.

"But you did something everyone thought was impossible," he whispered, and lifted her hand to his lips. "I am proud of you."

Jennie ducked her head, automatically. She wasn't used to hearing compliments, and the tips of her ears blazed red amidst the silver



locks of her hair.

And Liam only caressed her more, smiling as his fingers moved over the slim bones of her wrist.

Even without regaining her memories, she felt free.

Leaving Jongin behind, she had felt absolutely nothing. Her heart had been as cold as snow. She had even gone as far as feeling hatred for him. She was not completely free of the spell, but knowing that her feelings were once again hers filled her with joy.

Jennie remembered the iron door she had seen in her dream. Thanks to the baby wolf's help, she had broken the chain wrapped around it. Now she only needed to open the lock. It seemed impossible. How would she open a lock that had no key? But the thought did not frighten her anymore.

She would do it. She would take back her memories.

\*\*\*

That night, Jennie stayed at the inn. She wasn't even sure when she fell asleep; it seemed as soon as the tension from her confrontation with Jongin finally faded away, she had immediately lapsed into unconsciousness. Jennie woke up the next morning as the sun was rising.

And Liam was the first thing she saw.

It was embarrassing but satisfying to see him the moment she opened her eyes, and they bathed together and then had breakfast.

They spoke of the things they couldn't the day before. Part of the spell had been broken, but there were still too many problems remaining to be easy.

Liam refused to even let go of her hands.

"I will not leave you alone," he said, and Jennie remembered the people in the palace, moving about like puppets on a string.

Somehow, she had a feeling that she would become one of them.

Jongin would do it to get his hands on her. With his insane fury, he would do anything, and now that she had told him she didn't love him, he wouldn't hesitate. Jennie was silent for a long time.

"What was in that potion the old Toma woman gave me?" She asked finally.

"It's a simple potion," Liam replied. "It's used to change hair color. Morga could create it, too."

Well, Jennie hadn't expected the old woman to have great powers. If she had, she likely would not have asked for Jennie's help from the beginning. But perhaps that potion was a clue to something else.

As soon as she thought of that, Jennie's mind began working frantically.

Her goal was to break the spell on the people of the palace by forcing them to realize there was something wrong. And why else would the Toma woman have given her a potion that changed hair color? Even as she was speculating, Liam said it aloud.

"I think I know what this is for," he said, and reached to tug a lock of Jennie's hair, looking at the gleaming silver coiling over the palm of his hand.

"Jongin. That sounds more like a blond man's name."

The moment he said it, Jennie understood what he was proposing. It was as if someone had struck her hard in the back of her head.

Jennie covered her mouth with her hand.

Many things came to her mind, but more than anything else, the image of Jongin floated in her mind's eye. A man who looked nothing at all like Jennie, or the dead King who was supposed to be his father.

He only looked like Cerdina...

Jongin was not part of the royal family of Estia.

Cerdina had not only hidden the fact that she was Tomari, she had conceived a son with another man and then claimed that he was the son of the king.

And even that had not been enough for her. She had aspired to place him on the throne, and had succeeded.

Jennie's expressionless face slowly hardened as she realized everything Cerdina had done. She bit her lip. But in her fury, she suddenly had an idea.

"Is it possible to make it look as if a spell has been broken, even if it hasn't?" She asked thoughtfully.

"It is possible."

"Then...if it's also possible to pretend to be under a spell..." Slowly, Jennie outlined her plan for him. If done correctly, they might be able to damage Cerdina's spell on the people of the palace. She would need to shake them hard, if she wanted to wake them up.

Jennie talked for a long time, excited by the possibility, and Liam finally agreed to try it if Morga agreed that it was possible. And though Jennie was exhausted after talking for so long, as soon as she caught her breath, there was another matter she wanted to discuss.

"I remember escaping with you," she said, sure that he would remember all the details of the story. But Liam only looked at her curiously.

"We never escaped," he said, crossing his arms. "I kidnapped you."

"You kidnapped me?" She asked, puzzled.

Liam looked mischievous.

"Oh, yes," he said, smiling. "You didn't want me to, but I kidnapped you anyway."

"Don't joke."

"It's the truth."

The more she learned about her past, the more confusing it was. What had her relationship with this man been like? Jennie shook her head and brushed it away.

"I meant...when we were young."

The words sank into him, and she saw the pupils of his golden eyes contract, and then shrink. Somehow, that sight made her feel a little afraid.

"I remembered that moment. A little. Only a short memory..."

He said nothing, just looked at her as she stammered, trying to remember the details of that too-brief vision.

"We were running down a narrow hallway, and you looked young...and you were hurt, you couldn't run very well. And you were so thin..."

She trailed off. That was all there was. Not even a story, only the briefest flash of a memory.

"I thought you had forgotten..." He said slowly, and his voice wavered slightly. "That memory...was part of a spell? And you remembered it..."

He trailed off. Was there something more she didn't know? He was so troubled, she ran a hand over his forehead.

"Does that mean you're younger than me?" She asked, searching for a lighter question to make him feel better. He smiled.

"Kurkans look younger before our coming of age ceremony. And back then I wasn't just being...mistreated. They didn't feed me."

That revelation shocked her. She had only been joking, she had never imagined...the smile fell from her face. Somehow she had thought Ishakan had always been as he was, powerful and unshakable. But he had been young and weak, once. He had been abused.

"How...?" She whispered, and Liam smiled, shrugging.

"There were a lot of bad people."

But Jennie couldn't dismiss it that lightly. Looking at her unhappy face, he frowned.

"It's pathetic, isn't it? My heart hurts too, when I remember." He touched her cheek, under her eyes where tears were welling. "Kiss me. That will make you feel better."

Quickly, she lifted her lips to his, and Liam's arms wrapped around her waist to pull her into his lap.

She had meant only to give him a single kiss, but somehow it lingered and deepened as heat burst between them.

"Ahh..." Liam's tongue thrust between her lips as he squeezed her breasts, his hands hot through the thin fabric of her nightgown. Jennie squirmed, trying to push him away as he moved over her hungrily. He was trying to distract her, but her worry for him tugged at her heart.

"What happened to the people who hurt you...?" She asked, determined to finish their discussion. If he hadn't retaliated against them, then she meant to do something about it herself.

"It's all right," he said bluntly, untroubled. "I already killed them all."

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## Chapter 161

### Chapter 161 - Brochette

Jennie stared, too shocked to speak.

"I didn't just kill them," Liam clarified. "It is very easy to tear someone's head off, I could do that anytime. It's too fast, it's not fun."

She had just discovered that Liam ripped people's heads off their necks when he wanted to kill them.

"It's the same with that guy. I won't kill him easily," he went on. There was something dark and dangerous in that quiet voice. "He will be sunk to the bottom. I'll pay him back for everything he's done."

They thought completely differently. To Jennie, death was a tragedy, and a sufficient revenge by itself. But to Liam, death wasn't a punishment.

Death to a Kurkan was only a long rest.

She could not imagine what Liam considered a proper revenge.

Seeing her anxious thoughts, he smiled.

"I have said some very stern things to you," he said, laying his large hand on her head and gently stroking. "You ought to rest a while longer."

She didn't want to go back to sleep. The sun was rising, and she had just woken up. Jennie looked up at him, pleading in her eyes, and Liam's eyebrows lifted. He didn't know what she wanted.

All she wanted was a little quiet time with him. All her days had been chaotic lately. They didn't even need to talk. If they could just walk together for a little while, hand in hand...that would be enough to make her happy.

But it felt awkward just to say that. For a moment, she mulled it over,

searching for an excuse.

"Would you like to go to the market?"

Surely he didn't often have time to wander the streets of Estia, and it was a good excuse to go out and walk together. Liam even looked interested in the spontaneous proposal, and then suddenly laughed.

"I have to buy meatball brochettes," he said, laughing, as Jennie looked at him in puzzlement.

"Though I don't know if there will be any in the morning."

"...brochettes?" She didn't know why he was talking about brochettes, but it didn't matter, as long as they could go out together.

Quickly, she pulled on a hooded robe over her nightgown, and Liam checked to make sure her silver hair wasn't visible and then lifted her into his arms.

"I can walk," she protested.

"I know. It's just to walk down the stairs."

As they descended, they found the second floor empty, though last night it had been filled with Kurkans. Jennie trailed behind Liam past the empty tables.

Liam found and bought some meatball brochettes, pork meatballs that looked crispy on the outside.

The scent of their oil made Jennie's mouth water, and she barely had time to think it looked delicious before Jennie realized it was gone.

Liam started laughing.

Jennie stared at the empty wooden skewers in her hand, shocked at herself, and Liam roared with laughter as if she were a comedy he was watching.

He caught her hand.

"And that's enough of the market," he said. "I know of a good place, do you want to see it? I'm sure you'll like it too."

Jennie nodded, clutching the empty skewers in her hand as she followed him through the market. She still couldn't believe she had eaten it all. Liam's hand gently tugged her after him, pulling her against his side, when a muscular man suddenly fell onto the ground beside her, flat on his butt.

"Bastard!" The man shouted, rising to his feet so suddenly he almost knocked into Jennie, and Liam kicked him backward. Other men crowded close around the man, who was furious, and she realized at once what was happening.

The muscular man had tried to collide with her deliberately. It was a common tactic among thieves, to cause a fuss and then steal money in the confusion. Of course, she wasn't afraid with Liam there. Or rather, she was only afraid that he might start ripping heads off.

But Liam didn't even have to do that. Pulling back his own hood, he revealed his face, and his golden, glowing eyes.

"Bar, barbarian..." The muscular man stammered, shocked.

Liam said nothing. He just stared.

"Oh...I'm sorry..." The muscular man apologized, looking very nervous.

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## Chapter 162

### Chapter 162 - Sin

The man ran away with his tail tucked between his legs. It happened so fast that Jennie blinked in the sudden quiet of the street, and then followed Liam, who was walking away as if nothing had happened.

"Why did you kick him?" She asked.

Under the circumstances, Liam could have just avoided him. It seemed unnecessary and a little aggressive to kick him.

"The proverb says, when two people collide, so do their destinies," he said earnestly, pulling Jennie to his side. "I don't think you want to share a destiny with anyone but me."

She wanted to laugh, but pursed her lips. He wasn't kidding. And fortunately there were no other near collisions after that, and they left the market quietly.

Instead, Liam took her to a forest near the capital.

The land belonged to the royal family, but few people entered because of the dangerous animals that lived there. Liam entered it fearlessly, carrying Jennie in his arms.

It was dark under the trees, even though the sun had risen, with only a little light filtering through the leaves. Even though Jennie couldn't see clearly, his steps never faltered. He could see things she couldn't, he could hear things she couldn't. It was things like this that made her think that Liam was not really human.

She was a little worried that they would come across a wild animal, but they kept their distance. The forest was so quiet, she wondered if they had all fled at his approach.

"Originally, I wanted to go to the palace and see the tuberose," he said as he carried her. "But everything is withered in that place."

At that moment, the trees opened before them and the sun shone

down on a glade, with blue sky overhead. There was a lake so crystal clear that Jennie could see all the way to the bottom, and as the wind blew, leaves drifted from the trees to rest lightly on the surface of the water. The sun glowed green on the leaves.

Liam gently lowered her to the ground, and Jennie slipped out of her sweltering robe, moving through the underbrush to the lake. A cool breeze ruffled her hair as she gazed at that pure, clear water. It was so beautiful, as if it had never been touched by humans.

And this place was so filled with life, compared to the gloom of the palace. Jennie felt revitalizing, gazing into the water, smelling the fresh scent of the forest. Belatedly, she looked back at Liam.

He was standing under the shade of a tree, gazing at her unmoving as if she were a forest creature he might startle. She opened her mouth to speak, but Liam spoke first.

"...Dazzling."

His voice was a little hoarse, filled with a passion that made her feel self-conscious. She touched her hair, the silver locks seeming to shimmer in the sunlight. Liam tossed his own robe onto the ground and approached her.

"What if the sun melts you?"

"I'm not a snowflake," she replied, making him chuckle. They were facing each other, and she could smell the fresh, faintly sweet smell of grass on his body.

Suddenly she felt very shy. Jennie looked away, avoiding his eyes, scanning the edges of the lake where small white wildflowers grew in tall green grass until a large hand suddenly came down before her eyes.

She could see the veins rising on the back of that powerful hand.

"Even when we first met..." The sound of his voice made her turn her head to look up at him, and he gently stroked her cheek. "...you were dazzling."

His golden eyes glowed in the sunlight. Jennie's lips parted. Him. He was dazzling.

"I thought I didn't care about those memories, but I was wrong," he said, his fingers gently touching her softly parted lips. "I thought it was enough that you loved me. But I get greedier and greedier..."

Liam exhaled heavily. His voice was low, as if he were confessing a sin.

"I want you to remember me, Jennie."

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## Chapter 163

### Chapter 163 - Broken Bed

Liam looked as if he regretted saying the words as soon as they came out. Lovingly, his hand brushed her face.

"...I'm sorry."

It was obvious why he tried so hard to hide this in his heart. He didn't want to pressure Jennie to remember. He wouldn't have said it at all, if she hadn't regained control of her feelings. Liam would never have said a word, if she hadn't.

But now the wind blew a long gust, making Jennie's nightgown ripple and her silver hair to flutter, and Liam's voice cracked a little as he bent and whispered.

"Tell me you love me."

Her heart ached. It was still difficult to express her true feelings, but until she was completely free of the spell, she would need to speak them clearly.

Reaching for Liam, she hugged him and tried to make him believe it.

"I love you," she said sincerely, and even rose up on her tiptoes to hold him tighter and comfort him.

Liam smiled as she awkwardly kissed his cheek.

It made her smile, to see him smile. Liam kissed her forehead, a tickling brush of his lips, and when she reached to rub that place, he caught her hand and kissed that too. Everywhere he touched her tickled.

"Arrrrgh!"

All around Jennie and Liam, they thumped to the ground like a hail

of pecans. Among so many, Jennie recognized a few faces, and as soon as Haban got up he immediately started apologizing.

"I'm sorry! I'm sorry! But I wasn't eavesdropping, I swear!"

"Then what?" Liam asked shortly.

"Huh... that is..."

Mura interceded, as Haban had obviously didn't know what else to say.

"We came because we were worried," she said. "We were afraid you might do something to Jennie. Last time you broke the bed!"

All the other Kurkans started talking at once.

"Exactly! We have to be careful, what if something serious happens?"

"No matter how strong Kurkan babies are, Jennie is still fragile!"

"Right! Right!"

"Really..." He said, catching her hand with a self-deprecating smile. "I am only weak with you."

She was the only one who could defeat him. His arms went around her and she hugged him back.

Every time he referenced memories of their past, she wished she could share them with joy. She wanted to be able to tease him about when he had been weak to her. That's what she would do, as soon as she got her memory back.

"Thank you for coming to find me," she said after they had been standing together for some time, wrapped in each other's arms.

"Of course," he said, with a frown that said anything else would have been absurd. "I would have looked for you no matter where you were."

"But..."

"You did the same," he said, tapping the point of her chin. "You went to save me."

She could understand why she would, though she couldn't imagine Liam ever needing saving.

"I'll take you back," he said. "No matter what it takes."

Jennie's fists clenched, hearing this promise, and Liam chuckled. But then suddenly he frowned and bent close, looking around the forest as he whispered in her ear.

"Watch," he breathed, as if he were warning her of something deadly serious. "Soon they'll start falling."

Jennie wondered what on earth that meant, but it didn't take long to figure it out. A moment later, she spotted the Kurkans.

They were creeping out from the branches of the trees, clearly frustrated that they couldn't hear Liam's quiet voice. Then one of the shifting Kurkan shadows made eye contact with Jennie.

There was a moment of silence. All the shadows froze, hands and feet partially lifted, wavering, and then started dropping out of the trees.

"Ahhhhhhh!"

Of course, Liam didn't so much as lift an eyebrow, but Jennie's face was on fire.

She could not believe the bed had broken. She had thought the bed at Count Weddleton's mansion had been very creaky, but she had been too...distracted to wonder why.

Had they come in and repaired it while she slept?

It was amazing to think she had been so lost in sex with Liam that she hadn't noticed the bed breaking.

Jennie seriously wondered if she had lost her mind at that moment.

When Liam motioned for an end to the chaos, Mura patted the large bags that Genin and Haban were carrying on their backs.

"It's nice weather, why don't we have a picnic?" She suggested.

The fact that they had those bags with them proved that they had planned all of this beforehand, and also that Mura knew exactly what weaknesses to exploit when she remarked to Liam that they were filled with Jennie's favorite foods. Liam looked at Jennie. Then all the Kurkans looked at Jennie

"Don't look at her," he ordered, and they all quickly averted their eyes, so she wouldn't be overwhelmed. "Is that all right with you?"

Jennie could feel all of the Kurkans secretly watching, even though they were pretending not to.

It made her smile. They had come because they had wanted to share with her.

They were all so much bigger than she was. Their strength was so formidable, and she had seen with her own eyes how they could kill with their bare hands. But for some reason they seemed more adorable than terrifying. Maybe it was some remnant of the memories she had lost.

It was like a rabbit looking at a pack of fierce predators and thinking how cute they all were, but Jennie wanted to get closer to them.

"It's okay if you agree," she said cautiously.

The Kurkans cheered almost before the words had left her mouth, apparently convinced that Liam could not refuse if Jennie had agreed. Quickly, they spread out the picnic, and Jennie and Liam took their places beside the lake. The rest of the Kurkans sprawled around them on the grass.

As Haban and Genin distributed bottles of wine to everyone, Mura set out a variety of food before Jennie, and Liam sat her in his lap and slowly began to feed her. All of the Kurkans were excited, happy and animated as they chattered away.

Their excitement was contagious. Jennie took a large bite of the snack Liam was eating, and her eyes widened in surprise. It was so sweet, it made the hairs on the back of her neck rise, but his expression didn't change in the slightest as he ate them. He even caught hers when she tried to slip it back into the bowl and popped it into his mouth.

"Why? Don't you like it?"

"It's too sweet," Jennie said, watching as he chewed and swallowed. "Doesn't it taste sweet to you?"

"Yes."

Maybe he had a sweet tooth. Watching, she saw that he even added honey in his wine. Suddenly, she was distracted by a drunken shout from Mura.

"Cheeky bastard!"

Grabbing Haban by the neck, Mura threw him on the ground, and soon the two were wrestling together on the grass. Apparently Haban, who was also intoxicated, had made an ill-advised joke and was now yelling apologies.

Jennie blinked in surprise.

"They are a couple," explained Genin as she brought Liam another bottle of wine. "Don't worry about them."

Jennie nodded. Her eyes went to Liam, who was pulling the cork of the bottle of wine with his fingers.

"Liam!" She leaned over to whisper to him. "We...we're a couple too, right?"

He didn't answer immediately. He set down the wine bottle first and then lifted his eyes to hers, with a sudden flare of lust as if he meant to devour her like a sweet. Jennie shifted back automatically as he bent closer to her, and there was no point in trying to retreat. He gazed at her, unblinking.



He looked at her for a long moment before his eyes flicked around them. Everyone else was watching the show Haban and Mura were putting on, and Genin was circling them, pretending that she was about to intervene.

Liam made sure no one was watching before he kissed Jennie. His lips rubbed hers and his tongue tasted sweet as it slid into her mouth, and Jennie's eyes closed. She had to resist the urge to moan.

The sweet kiss was short, but Jennie's face was completely scarlet. Anyone who saw her would have thought she was guilty of a crime. Liam's eyes curved as he smiled at her expression.

"You still don't know?" He asked her mischievously.

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## Chapter 164

### Chapter 164 - History of Mura and Haban

Jennie couldn't even answer the question. All she could do was fan herself with her hands, trying to cool down and wave away her flushed cheeks.

She managed to regain her composure before Haban and Mura's spat was over, and inside she thanked them for keeping everyone distracted.

Of course, she and Liam were a couple. There would have been no reason for him to cross the vast desert and come to Estia for her otherwise. But when she heard the word couple, the question popped out before she could think about it...

Turning to Liam, she noticed that he was being very quiet, and she frowned for a moment. To her it made it seem obvious that they had been up to something, but she quickly assumed an innocent expression, as if nothing had ever happened at all.

Mura returned to Jennie, brushing away the grass on her clothes. Glancing at the empty plate before Jennie, she quickly went to the lake to wash her hands and then began filling the plate with snacks again. Jennie bent over to pluck some of the grass from Mura's hair.

"Are you okay?"

"Of course," Mura replied, with a playful wink. "A couple's fight is like trying to cut water with a knife."

A distance away, Haban was drinking alcohol as the other Kurkans teased him, and the equally inebriated Mura sat down next to Jennie, smiling like a fox.

"Did you like the food?" She asked.

"It was delicious."

"I cooked it myself."

As she praised Mura's efforts, Jennie suddenly realized that the Kurkan woman was slyly watching Haban.

"I have come to attend to Jennie," said Genin, and Mura turned to look up at her, her eyes widening as if that were strange. Genin jerked her chin at Haban, and Mura shrugged and went over to him.

Bending, Mura sat down beside him to whisper something in his ear, and Haban finally accepted her hand, his face sulky.

"Mura made him submit after he played a prank on her," Genin explained in a low voice, sitting beside Jennie.

Watching them made Jennie wonder how they had ever become a couple, but she couldn't quite bring herself to ask. Surprisingly, Genin took it upon herself to explain.

"We all went to the same academy," she said. Haban and Mura had always stood out academically; they were the best among all the students at their academy. No one could compete with them.

The two had always fought for first place in all their exams, and everyone had different ideas about who was better. And Mura, who was always proud, had decided to challenge Haban directly.

It was not a simple competition. It was a battle to determine supremacy. Everyone was excited, and Mura lost their first battle before the eyes of all the Kurkans of the Academy.

To acknowledge her defeat, Mura got the tattoo on her face, beside her eye. She had expected Haban to humiliate her for her loss, and even prepared herself to face him, but curiously, Haban had begun avoiding her.

Mura thought he was ignoring her.

She was determined to have a rematch, and she had given up all of her other activities, even cooking, so she could train to confront him again. But even when Haban lost their second battle for supremacy, Mura was not satisfied, despite her victory. Surprisingly, she felt very uncomfortable.

In defeat, Haban said almost nothing. His face was dyed red as he hesitantly congratulated Mura, and then left as if he were fleeing.

The next day, Haban arrived at the institute wearing the same tattoo as Mura, but beside his other eye. His face was red as a tomato as he approached her to make a serious proposal. Mura was shocked.

*You want to date me?*

It was absurd. She thought he was joking at first, but soon realized he was very serious; he was trembling like a broken doll. She decided to see him because she thought it was adorable that he had gotten the same tattoo, and they dated for a long time before they got married.

"Do you have a husband, Genin?" Jennie asked, after Genin had told this story.

For some reason, the atmosphere grew a little tense.

"...of course," Genin answered slowly.

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## Chapter 165

### Chapter 165 - Potent Antidote

Genin smiled a little, as if the bare thought of her mate made her happy. But though her mouth was smiling, the intoxication in her eyes faded to something somber, and she seemed to hesitate to continue. Liam, watching, handed her a full bottle of wine, and Genin emptied it in one gulp, then knelt down in front of Jennie.

"Lady Jennie," she said, and Jennie couldn't help sitting up straight at the formal address.

"My mate is too weak to travel so far." Her lips pursed for a moment, and her voice lowered. "I promised him when I left the desert that I would bring you back."

She said this very seriously, and there was a hint of guilt in her eyes.

"Everyone is waiting for you," she said earnestly.

"We will definitely bring...bring our Queen back."

Genin seemed embarrassed; she left so quickly, it seemed as if she was running away. Bewildered, Jennie looked at Liam.

"Everyone is a little drunk," he said calmly. "Don't make too much of it."

It didn't seem like something Jennie should ignore just because Genin was drunk, but Liam didn't want to talk about it. For now, she decided not to ask questions.

The spontaneous picnic continued after the sun went down. Jennie hadn't been drinking, but she was so excited, she almost felt intoxicated. They were all so happy, it swept her along with them, and when they began to break into songs in Kurkan, she even tried to sing along.

She felt relaxed. She wasn't anxious, she wasn't worried. She didn't have to work to guess what their true intentions might be underneath

their expressions and gestures. All she had to do was enjoy herself, without thinking about anything at all.

All of them were enjoying themselves happily, with a lack of self-consciousness that was completely different from the palace of Estia. Maybe in the past, every day had been like this. She had shared this happily with the Kurkans...

As she tried to imagine what a normal day had been like with them, a touch suddenly jolted her back to reality. Liam's fingers caressed her cheek.

"Let's walk for a while," he whispered.

Rising, she moved quickly after him. She had been neglecting him. She had come to spend time alone with him for the first time in a long time, but had been distracted in the company of the Kurkans. And they probably wouldn't be able to do this again for a while.

Somehow, Jennie thought this was likely the last moment of peace before the storm broke. She wanted to spend more time with Liam.

Leaving the Kurkans behind, they walked together into the forest. It was dark under the trees and the ground was treacherous with roots and stones, so Liam lifted her into his arms. He smelled sweetly of the wine he had been drinking.

"What did that song mean?" She asked. "The one we just sang?"

"It is a song that praises the beauty of the desert." She could hear his affection for his homeland in the words.

"I think you miss the desert too," she whispered. He smiled slightly.

"There's no point in being in the desert without you."

She didn't know what to say to that. Her fists clenched as Genin's voice echoed in her ears, calling her Queen. At that moment, Liam came to a halt before a bright space, where a beam of light made its way through the thick leaves of the dark forest canopy. Gently, he set Jennie down.

She looked at him, standing in that small space of illumination.

"Let's go back to the desert together."

The words escaped before she could think about them, and his eyes widened, a smile broadening over his face.

"Yes. We'll go back together," he said quietly. "There are many things we will have to do when we return.

We will have to have our wedding again."

For Jennie, the experience of a wedding was completely new. She couldn't imagine what a Kurkan wedding dress would look like.

"And probably our five nights again," he said, startling her. Suddenly, Jennie remembered the bed at Count Weddleton's manor.

"We broke the bed at the manor," she said.

"We broke the bed all five nights of our wedding, too."

"We also broke an iron pillar and some chains."

Jennie did not remember this at all.

"There's a lot I still don't understand," she muttered. Liam looked at her quizzically.

"Did you have any memory of those five nights before I mentioned them?"

Jennie shook her head.

"It seems the spell is still strong," he muttered.

"There's something I haven't told you, though. There is a potent antidote to the spell."

Jennie's eyes grew wide.

"What is it?"

"Well, I already gave it to you not too long ago..." He said cheekily, without changing his expression. Jennie looked at him curiously. "My semen."

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## Chapter 166

### Chapter 166 - Outdoors

Maybe he was drunk.

For a moment, Jennie thought that was the problem.

But his face was so serious, it made her narrow her eyes, and Liam smiled as he looked steadily back at her, silent.

She felt her mouth go dry. It made her weak, when he did this. Every time he stared at her, with his eyes filled with so many emotions...

Jennie looked away. Standing in that single beam of light in the dark forest, she looked white as snow, but Liam still stood partially in darkness.

Reflexively, she pulled him to her to stand completely in the light.

The way he looked at her was like a child who had just learned what it was like to fall in love. His arms embraced her and he kissed her gently over and over, kisses filled with warmth and deep affection.

It was embarrassing when she realized he wanted to have sex outside. And it also didn't seem like a bad idea. She had already done so many things she could never have imagined since she met this man, but she couldn't help trying to distract him first.

"The Gypsies you took out of the royal palace..." She began.

"Morga will talk to them in your place."

"Then the other Kurkans..."

"They are celebrating the fact that you have regained your feelings."

She hadn't known that. She'd thought they had just come to enjoy a picnic with her, without any other meaning behind it. Jennie nodded.

"Do you have any other questions?" He asked quietly.

She nodded again, and then racked her brain trying to think of something to ask. She couldn't think of any questions that didn't sound foolish as he pushed her backward, propelling her into the trees with effortless strength until her back pushed into the trunk of a tree. When she looked up at him, Liam thought her eyes were as round as a baby rabbit's.

"Jennie..."

As soon as she saw the slight anxiety in his golden eyes, she felt herself relenting. The Kurkans, with their beast blood, could not be considered human.

Surely it was a struggle for him to keep his patience when he was with Jennie, with his instincts fighting his reason. Silently, she opened her arms.

At that moment, she didn't care about being embarrassed. She was willing to do anything to please the man she loved.

The second she granted permission, he dropped to his knees before her, and Jennie held her breath. He was like a knight, swearing an oath before her. He smiled as he met her eyes.

"This is the first time I've knelt before anyone since I came of age."

But his next action was anything but chivalrous.

Lifting the skirt of her nightdress, he buried his face in her, the hem of the thin gown fluttering. Jennie pulled back her skirt, startled, but it made no difference. It only made him look more lewd, and she almost covered him again until his sudden motion made her hands jerk.

Liam's teeth bit her thighs, working upward until he reached her underclothes. Turning his head, he licked the thin fabric with his tongue, then tore it apart with his teeth. Watching him, Jennie swallowed dryly.

".....!"

Parting her pussy with his thumbs, he licked her clitoris without a

moment's hesitation. The tingling sensation made her rise up on tiptoe, her thighs trembling. Jennie moaned as the tongue tormenting her clitoris pushed inside her.

"Ah, Liam...!"

Her legs wobbled. She almost fell, but Liam gripped her tight with his large hands as a shiver raced through her whole body, as if she was being caressed with feathers everywhere, all at once. Her head shook from side to side at the unbearable pleasure.

"Ah, ahhh..."

Liam withdrew his slippery tongue from her opening and bit her swollen clitoris with his teeth. Jennie's back arched. Her fingers, which had been gripping the skirt of her nightgown, fell away, letting it slide down her thighs. Liam pushed the fabric out of his way as he relentlessly tormented every sensitive spot between her legs.

She tried to push him back, her hands shoving at his shoulders, but Liam didn't budge. Then her hands shifted to cling to him as the pleasure overwhelmed her.

Was it because of the stimulation from being outdoors? The sensations were becoming too intense. She was so close to climaxing, but Liam was skillful and controlled. His mouth worked furiously to push her, but the second she was about to do so, he drew back to lick her gently.

She was going crazy as she almost climaxed over and over. Jennie spread her legs as wide as she could, completely forgetting that they were outside in the woods.

"Ahh, hmmm..."

This time she was going to come. Unconsciously, she pressed herself down against his mouth, but suddenly there was nothing there but cold air.

Liam had moved his mouth away.

She was impatient. Her legs were trembling. She was so close, she

just needed a moment more to climax, and every time he stopped at the last second. Her body felt so sensitive that even the slightest breeze passing by made her moan.

Panting, she looked at Liam.

"Liam, hurry..." She pleaded, and he licked his wet lips as he unbuckled his belt. In one swift motion, he slid his arms under her thighs and lifted her, and as she reached quickly to wrap her arms around his neck, she felt something thick suddenly shove inside her opening.

Stars burst in her eyes. All the pleasure that had so narrowly slipped away instantly flooded her and she began to tremble, a sweet breath escaping her lips.

She was out of her mind. Coming, finally, so overwhelmed with pleasure she didn't know what to do, and Jennie scratched Liam's shoulders as saliva slid from her lips. His tongue swept her chin and then thrust into her mouth, and Jennie rubbed her tongue against his eagerly.

"Ahhh..."

Liam moaned, and the sound of it felt good. He rubbed his face against her neck and tugged down the top of her nightgown, exposing her breasts. Her pink nipples were hard even though he hadn't even touched them.

Illuminated by the beam of light, Jennie felt obscene. It was even more embarrassing when his large hands cupped her breasts, pinching her nipples.

"Jennie, look at me. Look at me," he said, almost begging, and when she finally looked at his face, she sucked in a breath. Those burning golden eyes seduced her. Impulsively, she kissed him, and Liam let her kiss him as he caressed her breasts.

Wrapping her legs around his waist, she moaned.

Her kiss intensified. Biting his lips, she swept his teeth with her tongue. She wanted to show him everything that she had learned

from him.

"Liam..."

Looking into his bright golden eyes, she confessed.

"I love you."

"I know, but..." He said softly, and then trailed into silence. He lifted his eyes to hers. "Tell me that more, Jennie."

Slowly, he bent his head to hers, his forehead touching hers gently as he whispered, his eyes on hers.

"Keep telling me..."

Jennie's lips tightened. Her heart felt so hot, as if the blood pumping through it were boiling. The feeling that swept through her was impossible to describe.

Liam provoked so many feelings in her.

Caressing the back of his neck, she whispered that she loved him. And every time she said the words, Liam kissed the corners of her lips.

Slowly, the manhood filling her inside began to move. The tingling in her body increased with his excitement, but Liam didn't speak. His face was ravenous.

The tree behind her shook as her body moved up and down, and Liam slid an arm behind her to protect her from rubbing against the rough bark. She was half out of her mind with pleasure, but Jennie didn't forget to keep telling him that she loved him.

"Ah, hmm, I love you... hmm...!"

The words stuttered, blending between her moans.

Her body trembled as she moaned loudly, clinging to Liam's neck, and he began to pound into her sharply.

Her toes pointed. Her calf muscles cramped. She squeezed her legs tight around Liam's waist to keep from falling. When she tried to push at his shoulders, Liam bit her fingers, and when she pulled them back in sudden fright, he bit her neck.

She didn't even feel the pain, though it was a hard bite. She was in no condition to feel pain, every nerve in her body was concentrated between her legs. Liam's hot breath huffed against her neck and he bit her again, his hands squeezing her backside hard. Unable to move, she felt trapped as the pleasure flooded her relentlessly, and she moaned with ecstasy.

And even though her mind was utterly blank, the words of love kept falling from her lips, confessing over and over.

"I love you, I love you..." Jennie had no idea how many times she had said it. "Hmm, ahh..."

Liam's chest swelled with each huge breath. Under her legs, she felt his back stiffen and suddenly the hot liquid poured inside her.

"Ah, ahh...!"

"Ahh..."

Inside her, his manhood jetted semen again and again, and Liam crushed her with his huge body as she trembled, clinging to him. Her legs lost their strength and fell away from him as she came.

All by itself, her body shuddered and her eyes clouded over, tears sliding down her cheeks at the intensity of the pleasure.

"Ah...ah..."

Even though he had finished filling her, Liam did not withdraw his manhood from her. On the contrary, he rocked his hips back and forth, spreading his semen over her inner walls. There was so much inside her, every movement allowed a little more to slide out of her, coating her inner thighs, mixing with her fluids.

His hot lips made Jennie shiver as he passionately kissed her neck, and it felt as if he was burning her.

"Please....put me down..." She was almost sobbing, feeling helpless with him holding her in the air.

Liam obligingly sat down on the ground with Jennie in front of him. He still had not removed his manhood, and the thick pillar penetrated her deep inside as she fell back against his chest as if she were collapsing.

"Pull it out too..." she said huskily. But though Liam always agreed to her request, this time he did not accept it. He only kissed her on the forehead, ignoring her words.

After examining the tree, Jennie's eyes went back to Liam.

Their gazes met. The intensity of his golden eyes was undiminished, and Jennie dropped her gaze, her hands moving to her stomach. Liam understood immediately what was troubling her.

"It's all right. You haven't been drinking normal tea," he said calmly. "It's actually medicine."

That was so unexpected, she gaped at him in surprise. His fingertips probed her lips and suddenly his thumb pressed into her mouth, brushing over her molars and then gently pressing down on her tongue.

Jennie bit down hard, and Liam withdrew his thumb, chuckling. His attention shifted to her breasts and her shoulders twitched as he gently brushed her nipples, his fingers wet with saliva.

"Do you want a son or a daughter?" Jennie whispered. She could barely speak with him touching her like this. Liam encircled her waist with one hand and caressed her breast with the other.

She didn't even have the strength to push him away.

But at least she hadn't fainted because they had only done it once, and the tree was still firmly behind Liam's back, an unbroken column.

"I would be happy with either one," he replied. "I am only worried about it affecting your health."

Kurkan babies were very small at birth. That was the reason her belly had not swelled much with pregnancy yet, and childbirth would not be too difficult. But he couldn't help worrying about her weak body.

"I have studied about it..." He continued, still caressing her breasts. "It is said that if the breasts are not touched enough, they will swell and become painful. Of course, that won't happen to you," he added. "I will massage them every night."

Already, her breasts were beginning to produce milk, preparing for the baby to be born. Gently, he moved Jennie's hand away from her other breast and bent his head to suck on her nipple.

"I want to taste everything that is yours."

She shuddered a little with pleasure. Licking her nipple, he began to stroke her other breast with his hand, and she suffered at the intense sensation of his tongue licking her. She had to cover her mouth with one hand to keep from making strange sounds.

Liam's eyes rolled up to look at her as he licked lewdly at her nipple, and it was so embarrassing that her face turned tomato red.

Her heart raced as she felt his manhood growing larger inside and Jennie began to tremble with fear.

"Hold still," Liam whispered. "I'll do it all."

Catching her waist in both hands, he lifted her up and then quickly lowered her.

".....!"

Jennie's eyes widened and her mouth opened involuntarily at the surge of overwhelming sensation that filled her body. He bit the tip of her chin hard.

"Tell me you love me."

That helped her calm down, and she stopped resisting. But instead of telling him she loved him, she said the words that had stuck in her like thorns.



"I'm sorry," she said. His eyes narrowed, and she continued haltingly, "I'm sorry I got nervous..."

He only smiled wickedly as he began to move her body. With every penetration her vision hazed over and soon she was climaxing, clinging to him and trembling as fluid squirted again between her legs.

"You said the same thing when you disappeared in front of me. I'm sorry, don't look for me..." Liam bit her earlobe as he thrust into her deeply. "But I came all this way anyway. Am I a bad husband?"

"Hmm, really..." She twitched as he licked her ear. "I like that."

Placing her hands on his shoulders, she looked directly into his eyes.

"I love you...I love you so much..."

There was a short silence.

"You're turning me into a softie," he murmured humorously.

He laid a hand on her neck, drawing her face closer to his.

"No matter what you do..." He said, resting his eyes firmly on her. "I will gladly follow you."

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## Chapter 167

### Chapter 167 - Obsession

It was a dream.

But even though he knew it was a dream, there was nothing Jongin could do about it. He could only watch as it went on.

Before him, a man and a woman were entwined together, a woman whose pure white naked body moved against the man's darkly tanned, naked skin.

The woman was hugging the huge man, her face reddened as she moaned, crying out his name.

*"Liam...ah, Liam...!"*

She was not doing this merely for carnal pleasure.

Her purple eyes were clouded with pleasure, but filled with such love, as if she were mad for the man she embraced. Everything in her eyes whispered endlessly that she loved him.

Jongin had wanted that look. He had longed for it, but could never have it. He wanted to shout insults at them, and he wanted to move between them and wrench the intertwined bodies apart immediately.

But his own body felt as immovable as stone.

As he struggled to free himself from these invisible bonds, the pair were moving toward the end. Jennie shuddered continuously, as if she could hardly endure it.

*"Ah, hmm, stop...!"*

She stiffened. Saliva wet her lips as she moaned uncontrollably and clung to the man's broad back, her hands trembling.

She had nearly climaxed. Unconsciously, Jongin found himself holding his breath, gazing at her as if hypnotized. Overwhelmed with

pleasure, suddenly Jennie's head turned, and her eyes met his.

Jongin woke up.

".....!"

The cool night air quickly brought him to his senses, and he found himself in the King's bedchamber.

Looking quickly around the room, he pulled off his blanket and sat on the edge of the bed, laughing to himself nervously.

His manhood was erect. Jongin tossed sweat-soaked hair back as he tried to calm his breathing, but his face contorted when he saw the silver strands of hair clinging stickily to his fingers, damp with sweat.

He pulled the rope next to the bed. As soon as the bell rang, the maids who were always waiting outside entered. Jongin looked them over one at a time, then pointed to the maid on the left.

"You."

The other maids departed instantly, leaving the girl alone. Jongin didn't even need to speak. He just shifted his gaze to his crotch and the maid immediately climbed onto his bed to suck him.

Expressionless, Jongin leaned back against the headboard, looking down at the girl sucking on his cock. Unconsciously, the maid looked up, and their eyes met.

Jongin smiled softly.

She was so surprised, she forgot to lower her gaze.

She stared at him as his smile spread, deepening, and her face grew redder and redder. Once she was red all the way to her ears, Jongin pushed down on her head with his hand.

His cock shoved deep into her mouth, and she let out a gagging noise as he pushed into her throat. He didn't care.

He looked at the maid and he was bored. He could have anything he

wanted, easily. He was good-looking, wealthy, powerful, the King of Estia. No one would refuse him, except one person.

Jennie...

She was the only woman he wanted. He thought of Jennie in his dream. She always had a somber expression, but in his dream she had looked so fresh, filled with life like a spring flower, fresh bloomed.

The Princess of Estia was beautiful. Even those who despised her as a flower with no fragrance were still impressed when they saw her.

Jongin's lips tightened. The maid with pale hair looked like a silver-haired woman in the dark.

Roughly, he pulled her head up by the hair to thrust into her as the image of Jennie moaning, her face flushed, filled his vision.

Rapidly, his hips pounded upward until he came.

"Damn..."

But bitterness filled his heart as soon as he was empty, and his mind was in chaos.

"Get out," he ordered, waving a hand. The maid fled immediately, and Jongin lay back down on his bed.

Jongin stared up at the ceiling with dull eyes. Above him was painted the royal family's coat of arms, and a bitter smile came to his lips as he looked at it.

Everything had come from Cerdina. His possessiveness, his twisted sexuality, his sick obsession. Just as Cerdina obsessed over Jongin, Jongin was obsessed with Jennie. The madness of the blood that coursed through his veins was not diluted. It was only refined as time went on.

Rising from bed, Jongin pulled on his robe and grabbed the bottle of wine from a nearby table to start drinking. He wanted alcohol because he couldn't stand reality, but his mind was still mercilessly lucid.

Jennie had escaped.

The same day Jongin realized that he could never possess more than her body, she had left with the King of the barbarians. At first he thought she would return quickly. It was a fair assumption when there were so many people at the palace who could be used as hostages.

But soon he realized something was wrong. The barbarians who had come to Estia as emissaries had disappeared as if they had evaporated, and they weren't the only ones. Every Toma in the city had also disappeared. He could only assume that they had been seized by the savages, and had commanded his soldiers to scour the capital for them. But they had disappeared without a trace.

Cerdina's power was constantly destabilizing.

Whenever it became uncontrollable, another wagon would leave the Queen Mother's palace, laden with sacrificed corpses, but Jongin didn't care much.

Even if her power was out of control, it was fine as long as Cerdina could cast one spell.

All he cared about was having Jennie.

If she didn't return the wedding, he was going to behead her ladies-in-waiting one by one. He would have their heads hung up in the capital for display, and after that, every noble that had been close to her would go to the guillotine, one at a time.

When she saw the crows devouring the rotting bodies, then she would have no choice but to return immediately to the palace. And as soon as she set foot inside, he would wait no longer. He would have her made into his doll.

The next day, Jongin personally attended the Cabinet Council meeting.

There were many inconveniences caused by Jennie's absence. With her gone, Jongin now had to handle all the work she had been doing alone. Of course, once she returned, then she would resume all her

old duties.

Jongin watched as the nobles entered, his head tilted slightly back. These creatures had no conscience. It annoyed him, wasting his time on these useless meetings. But as he looked at them, one of his eyebrows suddenly lifted.

".....?"

Count Weddleton smiled uncomfortably as he made eye contact with Jongin. Though he was the new King's grandfather, he had never been interested in politics. But suddenly, here he was at the Cabinet Council meeting.

And Count Weddleton was seated next to Count Seokjin. It was surprising; Jongin had not thought that they were close to each other.

Looking more carefully, he realized that there was something strange about Seokjin too. He was under a spell like everyone else, and should have accepted whatever happened at the Cabinet Council meeting as normal, even if Jongin was having sex on the table. But Count Jin looked puzzled, as if he knew that the princess was supposed to be leading these meetings.

Jongin was eying him suspiciously when the door suddenly opened, and Jongin turned with a frown. If the King had taken his seat, that door should not be opened. Even nobles were not allowed to enter if they were late, and could not leave until the meeting was over.

His first thought was to command his knights to drag out the lunatic who had opened the door, but he fell silent as the door opened the rest of the way, stiffening as he stared.

A small silver-haired woman entered and looked quietly around the room, turning toward the seat she had always taken. Jongin was seated there now.

Her purple eyes were shining as she looked directly at Jongin, and his mouth opened in surprise.

"...Jennie."

The Princess was back.

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## Chapter 168

### Chapter 168 — 'Hold Me'

Jongin couldn't speak. After saying Jennie's name, he was silent.

He had never expected her to return of her own will.

He thought the only way to ensure her compliance would be through violence and coercion, as usual, but apparently he was wrong. He hadn't done anything yet, and here she was. A silly thought popped into his mind.

"Why have you returned?" He asked, in front of all the puppet noblemen. Glancing at Count Valtein and Minister Laurent, seated along the table, a twisted smile appeared on his face. "You ran away with the barbarian as if your life depended on it, but you came back fearing the consequences."

"I am only attending the Cabinet Council meeting as Princess," Jennie replied calmly. "It's a duty I have to fulfill."

Jongin's patience was at an end. He rose to his seat and walked over to Jennie, seizing her wrist and dragging her out of the room. She only stirred after they left the room.

Jongin stared at her expressionless face. He couldn't begin to guess what she might be thinking. But suddenly, he felt the touch of a delicate hand on his wrist, and he loosened his grip on her. He remembered what Jennie had said to him once before.

*You have always given me delicious food.*

She confused her memories of the barbarian with Jongin. Maybe the savage had won her heart by feeding her good food. Jongin couldn't help asking.

"...Have you had lunch yet?"

"Not yet."



"Let's eat before we talk."

Though it was a bit early for lunch, Jongin led her to the dining room. The maids were puzzled at the King's sudden arrival, but hurried to attend them.

The dining room of the main palace was reserved for the royal family, though occasionally a few guests were allowed to use it. But though he and Jennie had often eaten together there, Jongin was uncomfortable. Jennie ate dutifully, and a strange tension settled in the silence. It made him thirsty, and he reached for wine.

Jennie only set down her cutlery when his bottle was empty.

"Go, all of you," he ordered without looking at the servants, and the maids filed out, leaving only the two of them in the dining room. Jongin's throat felt parched. As he reached for another bottle of wine, Jennie took it first.

"I'll pour it for you," she said, holding the bottle. "I would like a little white *wine* to drink..."

Immediately, Jongin rose to get a bottle of white wine from the wine rack in the corner of the room.

Jennie had already poured him a glass when he returned, and he downed it thoughtlessly, without even noting its taste. As soon as the glass was empty, Jennie picked up the bottle again.

Jongin looked at the white hand holding the bottle.

There was a ring on one of those slender fingers. The engagement ring he had given her.

He couldn't tear his eyes away from it. His eyes lingered on it, lost in thought, and slowly he raised them as Jennie blinked her thick silver eyelashes.

Her face was dazzling today.

"I hope you can reconsider *our* future," she said.

Our...

Jongin's lips parted. Our. He repeated it to himself several times, captivated, as Jennie's voice went on.

"I don't want to become a puppet. And I don't want the people I care about to be hurt."

Quietly, she explained why she had returned. She had not found a way to break the spells. She couldn't abandon those who were left behind in the palace.

Jongin had expected all that. Her words even sounded sincere. But her next declaration was completely unexpected.

"I will try to keep Your Majesty in my heart..." Gently, she squeezed his hand, which bore the engagement ring she had given him. "So please treat me kindly from now on."

A whirl of thoughts filled his mind as soon as he heard that. Were there still remnants of the broken spell manipulating her feelings? It was possible that the spell manipulating her memory might have reactivated her feelings, if she thought too much of the past...

It was a ridiculous idea. He should have snapped at her to stop talking nonsense, but his mouth was already saying something else.

"How can I believe you?"

Jennie was still staring at Jongin, her full lips pressed together. He gazed at those lips for a long time until they finally parted, and her tongue moved as she spoke.

"Tonight..." Jennie said. "Please hold me."

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That night, Jennie came to Jongin bedchamber.

Not only did she take the initiative to kiss him, but she undressed without being told. She was bold and yet shy, as if she were experiencing all of this for the first time. No matter what he asked her to do, no matter how embarrassing it was, she accepted it.

He had waited for this for so long.

He had never even dreamed of pleasure like this with other women. In this fantasy sex, the pleasure was so indescribable that when he came, the euphoria whited out his mind in a moment of absolute and incredible perfection.

When he woke up in the morning, the first thing he did was turn towards Jennie.

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## Chapter 169

### Chapter 169 — Fool

The space beside him was empty. An intense headache throbbed and his mouth was dry as memories of the night before filled his mind.

Remembering how Jennie had *moaned* with pleasure, he ran his hand over the place where she had lain.

Was last night all a dream?

He wasn't sure. Frowning, Jongin rose from the bed.

"...Jennie."

Suddenly, he shouted into the empty room.

"Jennie! Jennie!!!"

His eyes searched for her desperately, and like magic, she appeared at the bedroom door, dressed in a white gown and looking at him with puzzlement.

"Your Majesty...?"

Her voice brought him back. This wasn't a dream.

He had really been with her last night. Jongin embraced her without a word, and Jennie submitted to it without objection, though she was a little uncomfortable.

Jongin was so happy, he felt as if he owned the world.

For a while.

But hell was close on the heels of heaven. He had spent the night with her, but the more he thought of it, the more his happiness changed to despair.

He still did not have her heart.

He still didn't really have her.

Numberless fears tormented him, but more than anything else, the fear that she would still somehow run away with the barbarian king. It grew worse with every passing day until he couldn't bear to allow any visitors into Jennie's palace, even for necessary wedding preparations.

After days of sickening anxiety, he knew that no matter how obedient she appeared, he could never trust her. There was only one way to end this.

Jongin made his way to the Queen Mother's palace.

All the plants were dead around that gloomy place, and it was so quiet, even the sound of a mouse would have been audible. But there were none. As he walked towards Cerdina's chambers, Jongin didn't see a single servant.

The ornate wooden doors had long ago lost their original beauty, darkened by the blood of beasts and people. Turning a rusted knob, the reek of blood filled his nose as he looked at the woman lying in the middle of a magic pattern made of blood.

The woman wore no makeup on her face. Her hair was in disarray and her clothes were a mess. As soon as she saw Jongin, she tried to rise, but immediately collapsed back to the floor. Her body would not obey her.

"Ahhhh..." Cerdina groaned with pain, and the black smoke writhed out of her body as if it were alive. It was a long time before she could contain the black smoke inside her body, and Jongin watched her suffer and waited until she was calm enough to tell her what he wanted.

"Make her my doll," He ordered.

Cerdina glanced at him, hesitating, but when she opened her mouth to speak, he shouted first.

"Now!" He shouted. "Now, make her a doll now, right now!"

As usual, Cerdina obeyed him.

As soon as Jongin returned to the main palace, he ordered his knights to take Jennie to the Queen Mother.

"You promised me!" Jennie screamed as she was dragged away. "You swore you wouldn't! You promised you wouldn't turn me into a doll!"

But there was no one to help her. Once she was gone, Jongin walked alone through his palace, filled with a tempest of feelings he couldn't explain.

After the sun went down, Jennie returned to the palace alone.

Like the night outside the palace windows, there was nothing left in her that glowed.

Jongin looked into her unfocused purple eyes, so dark and opaque she looked as if she had died.

"Do you love me, Jennie?" He asked.

When she answered, her voice was empty.

"I love you."

Jongin's fists clenched. This was what he had wanted. This was his moment of triumph. It wasn't the way he had wanted it, but he had finally done it.

But he felt no joy. The thing rising from the depths of his heart was fury. Grabbing Jennie's arm, he yanked her roughly in front of him, suddenly enraged. But she did nothing. She only waited calmly to be told what to do.

"Damn it..."

Looking at Jennie with bloodshot eyes, Jongin stormed away, leaving her alone. There was nothing in the room but silence.

Slowly, the glow returned to unfocused purple eyes.

Laying a hand on her stomach, Jennie turned, looking around before she slowly spoke the name.

"Liam..."

She closed her eyes. It was time to end it all.

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## Chapter 170

### Chapter 170 — Secret Plan

Morga blinked tired eyes. Over the past few days, he and the other Kurkan sorcerers had been working straight through the nights, and now even when he closed his eyes, he couldn't sleep.

He knew that he needed to.

Frowning, Morga looked at the black potion boiling in a cauldron, and then checked a nearby hourglass to be sure that every last grain had passed into the bottom. It was time for the next set of ingredients.

As he was weighing them out on his scales, he glanced up as the door opened.

"Liam!"

"A gift from Jennie," Liam said, tossing a small glass bottle to him.

".....!"

Hurriedly, Morga checked the inside of the bottle to find a single lock of short silver hair. There was only one bastard who had hair like that.

Immediately, he dropped the lock of hair into the cauldron, and the bubbling liquid shifted instantly into gold and then back to black.

"Will that be enough?" Liam asked, watching the liquid changing color.

"It will be enough." Morga drew out a dagger and handed it to Liam.  
"Then..."

Liam dragged a chair over and sat down, then sliced his forearm with the blade. The sharp edge was already stained with his blood.

Morga set a wide silver basin under his king's bleeding forearm, the



vivid red dripping downward.

Ever since Jennie was first brought to the desert, Liam had ordered a number of measures to be taken. Now, they were nearly complete.

But it had taken a considerable amount of the king's blood.

Despite the amount of blood he was losing, Liam showed no sign of weakness. As his blood trickled into the basin, he extended his other hand to Morga, taking the lit pipe from him.

Blood dripped. Smoke floated upward as Liam inhaled. His eyes were dull.

"Then it will be best to use it the moment the spell is broken," he said, finishing Morga's earlier sentence.

"Yes," Morga replied. "Breaking a spell will cause a significant reaction in the sorcerer. It will be most effective if used at that moment."

Liam nodded, and Morga's lips pursed as he watched him quietly smoking.

They had hoped that Baroness Cinael's appearance alone might be enough to break the spell on Jennie's ladies-in-waiting. But even though that had failed, the Baroness had not given up, though she knew her life would be forfeit if she was discovered. She felt she had a duty to save them.

Seokjin and Count Weddleton also had roles to play during the wedding. When Jennie had first approached Seokjin, he had offered letters he had exchanged with Jennie as evidence of a past they had all forgotten. Those letters showed he had been kidnapped by Liam, extorted by Jennie, and forced to reveal secret information about the situation in Estia.

Jin himself did not remember writing those letters. That had been enough to shake the spell he was under, and with Morga's help, he had been able to break it altogether.

After that, Jin and Count Weddleton had both provided aid to the

Kurkans, though not entirely willingly. There had been a variety of threats.

And when it was all done, Jennie had returned to the palace, the only place she could try to retrieve her lost memories before the wedding. She had asked for Morga's help, and Morga had done everything he could for his queen.

But nothing was sure. Everything was so uncertain, it was impossible to know if the princess was even capable of retrieving her memories. But she had gone into the storm nevertheless, and Liam had decided to follow her, with no guarantees possible.

No matter what, the outcome would be the same.

Even if Jennie's memories were lost forever, on the wedding day, Liam would take back his bride.

Immersed in these thoughts, Morga came back to reality with a jolt when he saw the blood spilling to the floor, and quickly handed a cloth to Liam to staunch the bleeding.

Morga's hands were shaking.

As a mutant, Liam had superior physical capabilities.

He only had to press the cloth to his bleeding forearm for a little while, and the flow of blood staining the cloth soon stopped. Morga pulled out a clean bandage to wrap around the wound and then Liam rose, taking his pipe with him.

Slowly, he walked outside, where Genin and Haban had been quietly waiting.

"The Tomaris are here," Genin reported, pushing open the doors. Liam smiled.

"Let's hear what they have to say."

Descending the steps to the second floor of the inn, he found dozens of people kneeling as they waited.

Looking at them, he exhaled a puff of smoke.

"Have you guys made up your minds yet?" He asked, lowering the pipe in his hand.

The old Toma woman kneeling at the front of the group answered.

"We will do anything," she said. "Please spare our lives."

That was the old woman who had given the hair color changing potion to Jennie.

"Not everyone is here," he observed.

"There are still some who follow Cerdina, but it is only a small minority..." She spoke with determination. "We will do as King Kurkan wishes."

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Once she had made the decision to return to the palace, Jennie's biggest concern was still Jongin. She knew he would never leave her alone. Before he could do anything to her, she planned to make him believe he had already had her.

Jennie had given him a substance to cause hallucinations.

He had never noticed her pouring it into his glass.

After he had consumed it in his wine, he had hallucinations of sex with Jennie all that night, and as he gasped alone on the bed, she had cautiously approached to pluck out a few strands of hair.

Slipping the hair into a glass bottle, she had left it on a window sill of the Princess Palace. The bottle had disappeared the next day, then reappeared a few days later, filled with a black potion inside.

She would use it eventually. Until then, she hid it in a safe place.

Jongin was still hallucinating. Jennie kept him constantly supplied with the potion when they ate together every day, but as soon as he felt the slightest disparity between the real Jennie and his fantasy of

her, he had done exactly as expected. He had ordered her to be made into a doll.

When Jennie was dragged to the Queen Mother's palace at his command, she had seen Cerdina again, so completely disheveled that the only thing unchanged was her sparkling eyes.

That was the day Jennie had almost become a puppet.

*"We can risk it because the baby in your womb is like his father," Morga had explained, and added that they would create a magical tool that would help her temporarily resist the spell.*

Though Cerdina's power was unstable, she was still powerful. Morga hadn't been sure that Jennie would be able to resist her.

But Jennie had Liam's child in her womb. With the help of Morga's magic tool, he hoped that the baby would be strong enough to interfere with the spell.

The problem was that she would need to have the magic tool with her at all times. It had to be an item she carry without attracting anyone's attention.

Jennie looked at the engagement ring on her finger, shining brightly in the light.

It had worked perfectly. But its power had burned out from its only use, and from now on she would have to do it alone.

Alone, Jennie walked through the palace, searching for the fragments of her memory. This was her last chance. Everywhere she felt a sense of déjà vu, she lingered, but nothing came to her mind.

Everything else was prepared, but she still couldn't find the thing that mattered most to her. Every day she was more impatient. The day of wedding was coming, and it seemed that she might never recover her memory.

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## Chapter 171

### Chapter 171 — Bride

The day was dark. Clouds covered the sun and everything looked dull beneath the gloomy sky. Even the decorations adorning the outdoor reception hall looked lifeless.

It was all far too dismal for a wedding day.

Jennie, who would be standing before everyone that day, was already feeling suffocated. Her tight corset made it difficult to breathe, and she felt imprisoned, surrounded by so many people. The bride had not even been permitted water for some time, but no one seemed to care.

She looked beautiful in the mirror. Her white wedding dress was so spotless, it seemed like a shame to risk the least dust. Looking at herself in the dazzling gown, Jennie suddenly felt nauseous.

She wanted to tear that perfect dress to shreds, throw it on the floor, and spit on it. She had to resist the urge to clench her fists. One of her ladies-in-waiting was doing her nails. They had to be trimmed so she would not damage her royal husband's skin during their first night, and after they were done, her lady slipped lace gloves onto her hands, and then her engagement ring onto her finger.

Just as they were about to put on her veil, her ladies-in-waiting stopped at the same time. An intruder had entered the bride's chamber, which should have hidden until the wedding.

Dressed in an elegant suit, Jongin entered her chamber. It was a common belief that it would be bad luck if the groom saw his bride's face before the wedding, but Jongin didn't care. Far too many other things had already happened.

"Get out, all of you," he ordered, shoosing everyone out of the room. It left only Jennie and Jongin in the room, but he didn't approach her. He just leaned against the door and watched her.

The two had not seen each other for a long time.

After he had ordered Jennie to be made into a doll, Jongin had never looked at her. Now he just stared at her in her white wedding dress for a long while, and then turned and left without a word.

Jennie wondered why he had come, but she decided not to think too much about it. What she was about to do was far too important to worry about anything else.

Right before the wedding ceremony, she slipped out the potion she had concealed from her ladies-in-waiting and poured it into her mouth without swallowing, then hid the empty bottle where no one would discover it.

At last, it was time to go to the wedding hall.

Several ladies followed her, carrying her long train.

The wedding hall was extravagantly decorated.

Jennie looked at the guests seated in the rows. They had come to celebrate the union of a new couple, they were smiling happily, and they all looked like decorations.

As the orchestra began to play, she stood at the end of the aisle, marked by a long white silk carpet. In her hands she held a bouquet of colorful lisianthus.

Jongin was waiting at the other end of the aisle with the priest. Listening to the cheers of the crowd, she felt dizzy as she approached. Every step made her feel as if she was walking to the edge of a cliff.

Maybe she had been arrogant. Since she had managed to break one part of the spell, she had been so sure she would be able to break the rest and regain her memories. Now that she knew she was not alone, she had thought for certain she could do it. But only small fragments of memories had filled the empty places in her mind.

Jennie pressed her lips together.

I was greedy, believing I would get my memories back, she told herself. I just wanted Liam to be proud of me. But in the end, I couldn't...

In the front row of the guests, she found Cerdina, heavily made up to hide her haggard face. She was dressed as beautifully as if she were the bride, but malevolence filled her eyes.

Those sharp eyes scrutinized Jennie, and she looked quickly away from that critical gaze. In the end, she hadn't been able to find her lost memories. But there was work to be done.

Jennie reached the end of the aisle.

Standing beside Jongin, the priest went through the ritual blessings, and then extended a cup of wine to hunt first, according to Estian custom. Both of them would share the drink to be bound as a married couple.

As she lifted the cup to her mouth, she spat out the potion she had been concealing there and pretended to swallow. The black liquid dissolved into the white wine without a trace.

Jongin gulped the rest of the wine down and threw the glass away almost angrily. It wasn't an appropriate attitude for a man on his wedding day, but no one was surprised. All the guests only smiled vaguely, as if it had all been agreed upon beforehand.

"Jongin De Estia." The priest was also smiling as he spoke the final words. "Will you swear to love this woman as your wife forever?"

Jongin gave a twisted smile, as if at some secret thought.

"I so swear."

The priest acknowledged the reply and turned to Jennie.

"Jennie." He didn't stumble over the words as he repeated the question, even though the bride had the same last name as the groom. "Will you swear to love this man as your husband forever?"

Jennie did not answer.

The silence drew out and prolonged, rocking the placid ceremony and sending a ripple of disturbance through the room. It was enough that even the guests who had been applauding like robots paused for a moment.

Her lips pursed as she looked up at Jongin, and watched as his blue eyes faintly trembled. Murmurs of disbelief began to be heard through the reception hall.

Slowly, Jennie slipped her engagement ring from her finger and tossed it to Jongin.

It struck his chest and fell to the ground.

"You...you..." He stammered.

Outside, there was the noise of a battle horn.

As the wild sound broke the soft background music being played by the orchestra, confusion filled all the watching guests.

"Ahhh!!!"

The wedding guests began to rise from their seats, panicking as all the guards in the reception hall drew their swords all at once.

As the doors burst open, people dressed in light armor flooded inside, fast and lethal as beasts. The sound of clashing swords spread as blood stained the floor, and the guests began to scream.

All of those beautiful decorations were getting trampled by the panicking guests.

She found him at the moment of perfect destruction, a blood-soaked man whose sword streamed red. He looked at her with bright golden eyes, and Jennie felt a pain in her heart as sharp and excruciating as if she had been struck with an arrow. Her whole body shuddered.

This had happened before.

The déjà vu was so far beyond anything she had experienced before, Jennie held her breath. In her mind she saw a bloody plain, filled



with eulalies.

He had wrecked everything. He had ruined her as the Princess of Estia. And he had cut all the strings that had made her a puppet and brought her into a new world. Jennie had been born again under his protection.

The man who had destroyed her life spoke.

"Jennie."

The moment he said her name, she felt the strangest sensation. Why, she had never needed a key to the lock in the first place. Because all of her memories belonged to her.

"Come closer, Jennie."

Liam called her again, his voice growing slowly impatient. The way she was standing there unmoving was frightening him. Had she fallen under Cerdina's spell again?

"Please..." He whispered, his face twisting, and there was no reason to hesitate for one second longer.

Jennie ran to him, stumbling in her uncomfortable, unwieldy dress. Blood from his clothing instantly stained the white gown as he caught her, and Liam wrapped her in his arms and closed his eyes when he held her at last.

Her chest swelled against him, fighting the corset as she tried to catch her breath, and slowly calmed down. Liam whispered.

"...My wife."

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## Chapter 172

### Chapter 172 — Outcome

It was like a dam bursting. Memories poured forth in a deluge, pounding into Jennie's aching head as they found their proper places. Her whole body prickled with goosebumps and she shuddered repeatedly in the flood.

"Ahh..."

Jennie exhaled softly.

Finally, she understood what was really happening, and she slowly lifted her head.

Liam's golden eyes were exactly the same.

From the first moment they met until now, the way he looked at her hadn't changed. And how he had suffered, waiting for her. She had hurt him countless times because she couldn't even remember who he was.

She couldn't imagine the pain he had endured. And yet he had decided to wait, knowing all the risks in a way she could not, with no guarantees of success. He had trusted her.

"Liam, I-I.." Jennie tried to speak, her words stuttering.

But he already knew what she wanted to say.

"It doesn't matter," he whispered. "You came back."

His arms wrapped around her, hugging her tight.

"I've been waiting for you, Jennie."

It was all she wanted to hear. Jennie squeezed her eyes shut, but there was no time to indulge her emotions now. After a moment, she

drew back.

Her beautiful wedding dress was soaked with blood, but strangely she felt it was an improvement. Jennie turned her attention to Jongin, a much altered figure in her bloody white gown.

Jongin was already glaring at her, his blue eyes burning with rage.

"It was all a lie," he said, with a ludicrous expression of betrayal. There wasn't the least sign of remorse for what he had done to Jennie, no guilt, no regret. "You tricked me, you only pretended to be a doll, I can't believe..."

His voice was furious.

"It was even a lie when you spread your legs for me!"

He dared to blame her for even that. It had never once even occurred to him to reflect on himself.

"I told you I would never love you even if I were born again," Jennie replied flatly, and his eyes widened as her hand went to her belly. Just as he was opening his mouth to spit more venom at her, someone began to shout.

"His hair...his hair!"

Even as they watched, Jongin's silver hair, the hair that symbolized the royal family of Estia, was changing color. His hair shifted hue as if it had been dyed back to the blond that was his actual hair color.

Jongin stood frozen as shouts rose among the guests.

"A Tomaris trick!" Seokjin shouted on cue, pointing at Cerdina. "How dare a lowly Toma impersonate the royal family! She doesn't even fear divine punishment!"

The guests began to murmur among themselves in confusion.

"They aren't Tomaris, are they? What nonsense is this!"

"But...His Majesty's hair..."

Seokjin shouted into the confusion.

"The Tomaris have deceived us all! Count Weddleton!"

Count Weddleton jerked, hesitating as he looked nervously at Cerdina.

"It's true. Cerdina is a Toma. And J-Jongin is not a son...of the royal line of Estia..."

The words of Cerdina's own father instantly ignited chaos. Count Weddleton's voice grew stronger as he finished.

"I swear it is true by my name as Count Weddleton."

The spell broke.

Suddenly, the eyes of every person present filled with life, shaken from the dreamy calm of the spell by the sudden shock. They looked at each other in confusion.

Amidst the din of the crowd, Cerdina laughed scornfully, as if she meant to try to continue the lie, but her own body betrayed her as she suddenly shuddered and vomited red blood. The unstable powers within her rocked her body as her broken spells backlashed against her.

Swiftly, the Kurkans moved in to subdue her, but as soon as they drew close, black smoke blew up to drive them back.

Cerdina slowly lifted her head. Her mouth was stained with blood as smoke poured out of her body.

"Yes, I'm Toma!" She shouted wildly, scrubbing the blood from the corners of her mouth. "And all of you were ruled by the Tomaris you so despise!"

Cerdina gazed at Jennie, smiling as if they had not just cornered her.

"You dare to defy me with such simple tricks?" She said quietly, and Jennie's lips tightened with sudden anxiety. This was not what she

had expected to happen. Cerdina was recovering much faster than she had planned.

And suddenly, Cerdina's eyes shifted away. The trembling Count Weddleton nearly fainted when her gaze fell on him.

"Father," Cerdina said in a soft voice.

"Queen...Queen Mother," Count Weddleton said quickly. "I had no choice, I have been threatened--!"

"And I do not want to do this," Cerdina said. "But I have no choice..."

There was no more powerful sacrifice than a heart that beat with her own blood. She smiled faintly.

"You're willing to die for your daughter, aren't you?"

Count Weddleton was not permitted any final words.

There was no time for anyone to do anything. The black smoke lashed toward him in an instant and Liam yanked Jennie into his chest.

The sound of flesh tearing filled the room and Jennie squeezed her eyes shut, burying her face against him.

"Hahahaha...hahahaha..."

Laughing like a madwoman, Cerdina devoured her father's heart before the eyes of the horrified, frozen wedding guests.

When it was gone, she licked the blood from her lips.

The writhing black smoke stopped. There was a long moment of silence, and then the smoke billowed in all directions as Cerdina's body rose upward into the air, and darkness enveloped the whole palace.

Cerdina spoke.

**<Though the Toma of the first power was defeated by the mutant savage...>**

Her voice sounded strange.

**<It doesn't matter. For I have overcome her.>**

The black smoke filled the hall, and brushed the back of Liam's hand.

Liam frowned. A red mark appeared on his hand.

**<Barbarians!>** Cerdina's strange voice screeched, her face filled with joy. **<You will be leashed like dogs once more! You will crawl before the Tomaris on hands and knees!>**

The black smoke swirled around the palace like a separate atmosphere, and everything darkened as it covered the sky. Cerdina was laughing again, and the guests who had been coming out of the spell were as still as if they had turned to stone. As if invisible ropes were tugging on them, they sank back down into their chairs.

They looked like puppets. They looked like puppets watching a show.

**<Come here, my daughter.>**

Smiling, she looked down at Jennie.

**<Beg me. Tell me how you were wrong, and I will forgive you.>**

The words were filled with malice.

"Mura," said Liam softly. Mura approached from behind as Jennie gently pushed Liam toward her.

"Take her to safety."

Mura caught Jennie.

"Liam..." Jennie stretched out a hand toward his, and Liam caught it and lifted it to his lips.

"You go first," he said. "I have to finish this."

But even as he took her hand, she saw that he had been injured by the smoke. In spite of his immunity, Cerdina's magic could touch him.

Jennie didn't want to get in the way, but how could she leave him behind? Anxiety filled her eyes, and Liam smiled.

"Don't worry. We'll see each other soon."

He was so calm, in spite of the danger. Jennie pressed her lips together to hold back a sob.

"I have crossed the desert for you," he said suddenly, and she looked up at him, listening. "There were so many nights I couldn't sleep, thinking of you...and I always realized the same thing."

In spite of the darkness, his eyes shone so bright.

"I'm not afraid of anything, so long as I have you. Nothing is worse than losing you."

Jennie couldn't speak. She could only nod as he smiled down at her, lifting a hand to caress her cheek.

"I thought of a name for the baby. I'm sure you'll like it," he whispered, his final words. "I'll tell you when I get back."

And then he said goodbye.

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## Chapter 173

### Chapter 173 — Monster

Liam gazed ahead, his face expressionless. There was nothing left of humanity in Cerdina. Black veins stood out in her skin and she was pale as wax, with more black veins running starkly through her arms, her neck, even her face. Her eyes were pits of darkness.

"Have you become a monster?" Liam asked.

Behind him, the Kurkans swallowed dryly as they looked at her. She was a shambling mess. This rampage had been predictable from the beginning; there would never be an end to her quest for power.

They had even expected that she would be able to endure the backlash of breaking her spells.

They had not expected her to eat her own father's heart.

Liam glanced at the red line on the back of his hand.

She had probably meant to cut it off. Though it was only a flesh wound, it was proof that she was powerful enough now to harm even him. There was a possibility that he could die.

Jennie had seen that wound on the back of his hand, and at the moment she had looked as if she wanted to cry. No, Liam had no intention of leaving her a widow.

He had never considered defeat. Jennie was the only person that could defeat him. But considering that Cerdina's power might have rivaled a god, he was prepared to accept a little damage. He even concluded that he might have a few new scars, when this was over.

I don't like that.

Liam smiled. He wanted to be a stronger man for Jennie. He wished she would trust him, no matter what they faced. But she was going to see his naked body many, many times in the future, and if he came back with scars, maybe that would make her remember unpleasant



things.

Liam moved his injured hand out of the way. He would have to do his best to take as little damage as possible.

"Genin."

At his order, she handed him the longsword strapped to her back. The sword was a deep red, as if it had already been soaked with blood. As Liam wielded it, Haban and Genin moved into position on either side of him. The other Kurkans lined up behind them.

The sorcerers formed themselves into a semicircle with Morga in the middle. At a wave of his hand, each one drew out a sorcerer and sliced their forearms. Their blood did not drip to the floor. It floated up into the air, forming a magical pattern.

As one, all of the Kurkans' eyes gleamed at the prospect of battle.

<**You will die.**> Cerdina spoke in that strange voice. She had smiled, watching these preparations, and as she spoke, her words echoed in the ears of all the Kurkans there. Liam's eyes narrowed, but his smile did not falter.

Walking forward, he dragged his sword along the floor, moving toward Cerdina without hesitating.

"Toma witch." He had been waiting for this moment for a long time. The euphoria of battle was growing in him with every step. His golden eyes glittered.

"Today will not end with a warning."

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Mura ran without looking back. Rapidly, they left the hall behind, though Jennie's wedding dress made it a little difficult for her to move.

"Mura, put me down."

"I'm sorry, I can't do that."

"I don't mean to go back," Jennie said as Mura raced onward. "I just want to do something about this dress."

When she finally persuaded her, Mura set her down.

Leah stepped out of her heels and then lifted the skirt of her dress at the level of her knees.

"Could you tear it off for me?"

Immediately, Mura ripped away the cloth, and gave Jennie a moment to look around. The sky was covered in thick black smoke, and it felt as if they were all alone in the world.

Lifting a stone, Jennie handed it to Mura, who immediately understood and heaved it into the smoky barrier. The instant it touched it, it vanished without a trace.

"I don't think we can go outside," Mura muttered, frowning.

The entire palace was in Cerdina's hands. No matter where Jennie went, she would be in danger. Once they had confirmed it would be impossible to escape, Mura immediately suggested an alternative.

"We'll go to the safest place in the palace," she proposed. "There are Tomaris that will help us."

The hidden Toma would conceal Jennie from Cerdina's eyes while Liam confronted her. They were hiding in the palace's main garden. It wasn't too far from the reception hall, but it was far enough that they might be safe.

Leading the group of Tomaris was the old woman who had given Jennie the basket of roses. She bowed deeply, with reverence.

"Thanks to the kindness of the Queen, we are still alive."

It was Jennie who had saved them from being murdered by Cerdina.

"I will cover her eyes with a spell for a time," the old Toma woman went on, and as if it had been prepared beforehand, a magic pattern appeared in the grass of the garden.

It would be safe there. But Jennie did not step into the pattern. Instead, she looked back toward the reception hall, where black smoke was still rising into the sky.

She had gotten the people of the palace to feel disoriented. She had shaken them hard enough that Cerdina had felt the backlash from the disruption to her spell. But Cerdina had recovered so much faster than expected.

Jennie had left Liam in that place.

"Jennie," Mura called, urging her to safety. Jennie hadn't moved a step toward the safety of the pattern, and she only turned her head to look at the old Toma woman, reading the anxiety in her gaze. There was something the old woman wanted to say.

"Is there something else I can do?" Jennie asked, looking straight at her. Beside her, Mura's gaze at the old woman instantly froze, as if warning her not to say anything foolish. The Toma woman did not heed the warning.

"The King of Kurkan will not like it," she said cautiously. "For his Queen must be stained with blood..."

Mura's eyes grew darker.

"Explain," Jennie ordered. She didn't want to sit back and let Liam fix everything. Just as he was risking his life for her, she wanted to protect him too. "I'll do anything."

Mura's hands twitched a warning, as if she meant to wring the old woman's neck if she spoke just one more word, but Jennie caught her hand.

"Mura," Jennie said gently, persuading her with only a few words. "Haban is there, too."

Mura's lips quivered.

"Cerdina has abandoned her humanity for power," the Toma woman said impatiently. "The King of Kurkan is said to be strong, but this

may be...a little difficult. I would like to explain one way that we might help him."

She sounded serious and was obviously picking her words carefully. Jennie nodded for her to continue, gripping Mura's hand.

"Cerdina's spell was built on the foundation of Estia. Thanks to the royal family, she has gained almost infinite power." Which meant that Jennie was required, if they wanted to shake the spell to its foundation. "It is something only the true mistress of the palace...the true mistress of Estia can do."

"Why are you saying this now?" Mura asked suspiciously.

The Toma woman glanced at the huddling Tomaris, as if in answer to her question. All of them looked as if they had seen visions of the violent end of their lives.

"Because it is a method I did not want to use," said the old woman, with a bitter smile. "But today is the day of atonement, where we must cut the chains forged by the sins of our ancestors." The woman transferred her gaze to Jennie. "Do you want to help us with this spell?"

They likely already knew what her answer would be.

Jennie nodded, and as soon as the decision was made, the gathered Tomaris moved to transform the existing pattern on the ground, adding and shifting its lines. They had already prepared, assuming that Jennie would accept their proposal.

Watching, Mura muttered something in Kurkan under her breath. No one asked her to translate. It sounded like it would be rude in any language.

"We need a sacrifice," the old Toma woman explained. "In sorcery, a heart of the same bloodline is the highest sacrifice. That is why Cerdina ate her father's heart."

Jennie's lips tightened at the memory of Count Weddleton's grisly end.

"Then we must make an equivalent sacrifice?" She asked.

"That's right."

"But a sacrifice comparable to her father's heart..."

"Still..." the Toma woman said slowly. "There is someone else who is connected by blood to Cerdina."

\*\*\*

Jennie's beautiful white dress was ruined. No one would ever have known it was a wedding dress; it was not only blood-stained, it was in tatters, and the bride was walking down a long corridor in bare feet.

Coming to a halt before a large door, she slowly pushed it open. It was the Glory Room, filled with masterpieces made by artists who had wanted the light to shine on Estia forever.

On a clear day, there was a light that streamed through the window in the center of the domed roof, illuminating the room. But the sky outside was covered in black smoke, and the light in the room was very dim.

Jennie gazed out the window blankly. It didn't take long before she could hear noises from outside the room, and she hoped the door would open soon. The noise was getting louder as it approached.

Her hands trembled, and she had to force herself to stifle it. It would be a lie if she claimed she wasn't afraid, but she had to get over it. There was something more important.

*—I'm not afraid of anything, so long as I have you.*

She remembered a calm voice, a man who was not afraid. Thinking of his golden eyes calmed her.

The wait was long and time fled by as the noise drew nearer and finally reached the Glory Room.

The door swung open abruptly, and Jennie turned

her gaze toward it.

The first thing she noticed was his blond hair.

Jongin had not come alone. As they entered the room, Jennie looked away. Behind him were many other Tomaris.

Cerdina had betrayed them. She had eaten the hearts of her own people, a crime that was unforgivable in every nation. But still, there would be those who were attracted by her great power.

That was the case with these Toma, who still followed her. Even knowing her aberrant behavior, and knowing that at any moment she might decide to devour their hearts, they were still determined to follow her to the end.

It was ridiculous, but Jennie did not assume that they were merely stupid. Perhaps they followed Cerdina because their natures were the same.

Of course, the one most like her is the one she conceived...

Jongin's blue eyes went to Jennie, and he couldn't help laughing when he saw what she held in her hand, even as anger flooded him.

"Hahahahaha...! Are you planning to kill me with that?"

In Jennie's hand was a dagger. It was small, but sharp enough to cut through someone's flesh.

"That's ridiculous..."

Jongin raked his fingers through his hair. He was so furious he didn't know what to do with himself, and he turned away, muttering curses, then suddenly exploded, slamming his fists into nearby statues. A bust perched on a marble pedestal toppled to the floor.

"Kill me, bitch, kill me!" He shouted as he approached, his voice echoing loudly through the room.

Jennie said nothing. There was no longer any point in speaking. He had been twisted from birth, and he would never regret anything he

had done. It would be a waste of energy to talk with him.

He came to a stop before Jennie, and his hand shot out and closed around her neck.

"You babble all the time, and you don't have anything to say now?" He shoved his face into hers.

"Then why don't we both die..."

This was not just a threat. He really meant to do it.

Looking into his eyes, it was clear that he had completely lost his mind.

"I'll kill you first," he panted. "Just with my hands..."

But the moment his hands squeezed her neck, the glass window above them shattered, and Mura burst into the room, aimed straight for Jongin, but he dodged aside and narrowly avoided her. At that same moment, more Tomaris came racing in from the corridor.

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## Chapter 174

### Chapter 174 — Sacrifice

The Tomaris who had come with Jongin were soon lost among the Tomaris that had charged into the room to help Jennie, and soon there were dozens of them, fighting among the masterpieces, knocking them to the floor and trampling them underfoot.

Priceless works of art were smashed.

All of it happened in an instant, and amidst the chaos, Mura's eyes glowed cruelly. Quickly, she moved to brutally murder the Toma man in front of her.

Jennie caught Jongin's eyes. He had escaped to the back of the melee, and was staring at her across the chaos, shouting expletives. But Jennie ignored him.

Mura was moving swiftly toward him, and Jongin's eyes flickered as he realized the seriousness of the situation.

Jennie tightened her grip on her dagger. For the first time her lips moved, and she spoke.

"You're the one who will die, Jongin."

\*\*\*

Her power was like an ocean. No matter how much water was taken out, there was no sign of the bottom. Cerdina was intoxicated with power. It was so exhilarating, so euphoric, her consciousness clouded over.

She could do anything. Her power was so enormous, she knew no limits. The fact that she had finally attained the realm of the gods drove her into an infinite ecstasy.

Licking her lips, Cerdina looked at the barbarians before her. She had



resisted their attacks so far, and like a child toying with ants, she was stinging them a little bit at a time.

It wouldn't be fun to finish it all at once. She wanted to torture them and pay back all the humiliation she had suffered. That was one thing that had bothered her, that spells didn't work on the King of Kurkan.

Her spells did. She had become a god above any mutant savage, her spells could touch him, but she still couldn't handle him the way she wanted to.

When she tried to cut off his arm, it only gave him a small slice. Even though her magic could finally touch the creature, she still could not subdue him as she wanted.

His glowing, bestial eyes showed no fear. To her eye, it looked only as if he were enjoying the battle, and it was Cerdina that was feeling stressed. With every attack from his mysterious, deep red sword, an eerie shiver ran down her spine.

No god should feel that sensation. At that moment, all she could think was that she must kill him first.

".....!!"

Cerdina came to her senses as if cold water had just splashed her. Something was wrong with the Tomaris that were guarding Jongin. She could feel the connections through the spell snapping apart as if someone was cutting them with scissors.

It seemed as if they were trying to get their hands on Jongin while she was playing with the barbarians, and there was nothing she could do but drop everything and go immediately to where her son was.

Black smoke rose under feet, quickly engulfing her body. The barbarians tried to stop her from leaving, but she repelled all the spells they threw at her. Her only thought was to find Jongin.

Shrouded in black smoke, she arrived in the garden, but there was no one in that silent place. But strangely, she could feel traces of Jongin there.

As she desperately scoured it, she found a large magic pattern drawn into the ground. She had been fooled by such a simple trick.

Cerdina let out an angry shriek, and more smoke billowed out, spreading everywhere to search for him. It took a while before she could finally tell where Jongin was.

In the Glory Room.

Cerdina caught her breath. That was the place where she had gathered the Tomaris together for the first time, to ask them for help. And now that she thought about it, that magic pattern in the garden must have been made by Tomaris.

Her heart dropped in sudden, ominous foreboding.

Cerdina raced straight for the Glory Room, and the first thing she saw there was Jongin stretched out on a magic pattern drawn in the center of the room. His body was covered in a ragged white dress, stained with blood as if it were a shroud. His eyes were filled with fear.

Jennie raised her dagger. The blade gleamed.

"No...!"

Cerdina stretched out her hand. At her command, black smoke shot out like an arrow, straight for Jennie. But before it could touch her, the dagger pierced Jongin's heart.

\*\*\*

As Mura was subduing Jongin, the Tomaris he had brought with him cursed bitterly in their own tongue as they were defeated.

In the center of the Glory Room, they drew another large magic pattern, and that was when the rebellious Jongin finally fell silent. It was becoming clear what was about to happen.

One by one, the Tomaris that had supported Cerdina were sacrificed.

The eyes of the other Tomaris remained cold as they killed the people of their blood. The Toma people believed in supporting each other. This was not an easy decision for them. They had to sternly repress their emotions as they carried out their ugly work, and the final sacrifice to complete the spell was Jongin himself.

Though Jongin had been as contemptuous of other people's lives as if they were worms, it seemed that he had never contemplated the idea of his own death. Now he could only lie there weakly, his limbs broken, and wait.

He had killed so many people. Jennie remembered all those years where she could do nothing but watch. From an early age, she had been trained and indoctrinated to obedience. Unconsciously, she had always believed that she had to obey him and Cerdina for Estia's sake.

It was Liam who had rescued her from this narrow pit. It had felt as if she could only see the smallest slice of the sky, and he had brought her out so she could see all the way to the horizon.

He was the reason that she had been able to choose to cut herself off from her past, and more thoroughly and radically than she could even imagine.

She was about to take someone's life. She never would have thought she could do that, much less kill Jongin herself, but she knew she had been waiting for this day. There was only a sense of liberation, as if she had awakened from a nightmare she had been fighting to escape for a long, long time.

With her back to the dim light glowing from the ceiling, Jennie straddled Jongin with her bloodstained wedding dress tattered over her thighs. Jongin's eyes trembled as he looked up at Jennie, who held a dagger in her hand.

"Save me..."

It was an ironic request, considering he had been screaming that he would kill them both only a few minutes ago. It amused her.

Jennie brought the dagger down, to end the nightmare that had tormented her for so long, once and for all.

The blade sank into his body.

Jongin's eyes went wide. As if he couldn't believe it.

As if he had never once imagined that Jennie would dare to do such a thing.

The moment the blade pierced his heart, a shiver ran down Jennie's spine, and she reflexively clutched her belly as something slammed into her. Jennie rolled onto the floor as the black smoke dissipated.

"Ahhhhhh! Jongin, Jongin...!" Cerdina screamed, rushing toward him and grabbing for the dagger. It was too late. The blade had already pierced his heart.

She lost her mind.

Blood poured from her body, instantly absorbed by the magic pattern, and the light in Jongin's eyes went out.

"No, Jongin, ahhh...!"

Her whole body trembled as she felt for his pulse and found nothing, her hands covered with her son's blood. Suddenly her mouth opened and her body quivered, smoke writhing as she vomited dark blood.

Though she had been able to resist when Jennie broke her spell, this time she couldn't even move.

Her head fell onto Jongin's body as she began to sob in grief and desolation.

The watching Tomaris looked down at her.

"Now you know what it is, to lose the one you love."

Cerdina's head lifted. Tears of blood poured down her face as she screamed.

"Die!!!"

Black smoke billowed in all directions and swept away all the Tomaris who had cast the spell. Mura was flung away and smashed into a wall, black smoke stabbing through her stomach.

Blood poured. Mura fell to the floor, her hand stretching toward Jennie before she collapsed, overcome.

Panting, Cerdina turned toward Jennie with black blood flowing from her mouth. She couldn't move her body properly. Thick smoke wafted around her as she crawled on all fours toward Jennie.

Jennie struggled for breath.

She knew she should run away, but after she had been thrown aside by the black smoke, her legs wouldn't seem to work properly. Backed up against the wall, she reached with difficulty to pick up a sharp stone that had broken on the floor. Cerdina smiled and vomited up more dark blood.

"I'm going to kill you, too..." she muttered.

The distance between them was shrinking and shrinking. Jennie's grip on the stone was slippery with sweat, an insignificant weapon in the face of Cerdina's might. But Jennie held onto it with all her strength.

"Doesn't it seem fair?" Jennie asked.

Cerdina frowned.

"You killed my family. You stole everything from me..."

Jennie had lost both her parents. She had lost her right to the throne.

"So I paid you back the same way."

Cerdina smiled at the bold words.

"Shut up," she said, extending a bloody hand toward Jennie. Her face was empty and expressionless. "I have no interest in your final

words."

But Jennie's eyes shifted away from Cerdina, past her to the person that she had anxiously been awaiting. He had arrived.

She had known he would come just in time. Even though they hadn't planned this beforehand, she knew it, because Liam would always save her when she was in trouble.

His golden eyes glittered. His dark red sword stabbed into Cerdina from behind, before that bloody hand could touch Jennie. Oddly, the blade of the sword did not punch out through her other side. It disappeared as if it had melted as soon as it came in contact with her body.

".....!"

Cerdina looked down at her stomach. There was no visible wound. Her bare skin, visible through the slice in the cloth, showed no trace of blood. Her lips moved as she touched her stomach, but no words escaped.

There was only the sound of her rasping breaths.

To Cerdina, the pain was as if fire had been stabbed into her stomach.

Her eyes narrowed and she blew out more black smoke, but as it headed for Jennie a large body immediately blocked it, and Liam grabbed Cerdina by the neck and flung her back across the room.

Cerdina gave a piercing scream. Her power swelled and flared again, but this time the smoke was sluggish and slow to spread, shifting colors. And gradually, it faded away.

As she was staring at the evaporating smoke, Liam lunged for her and caught one of her arms in his hand. There was a terrible scream as he tore her arm off her body, and then grabbed her other arm and did it again, flinging the severed limbs to the floor.

Her blood drenched him.

At his feet, Cerdina's eyes rolled back in her head as she fainted from the agony.

Slowly, Liam turned to look back at Jennie, his gaze meeting hers.

"Liam," she whispered softly.

Liam moved slowly back toward her and sat down beside her. Above them, through the window in the ceiling, the sky cleared, and the light grew strong and bright and enveloped them both.

Jennie looked at the man before her, his golden eyes filled with rage, his pupils like a wild beast's. But she didn't look away. That anger was not for her.

Wordlessly, Liam hugged her trembling body, and all she wanted was to hug him back as hard as she could. With the immediate danger past, the pain she had only dimly felt surged forth, and Jennie stifled a moan.

"I'm...I'm fine..." She tried to speak normally, but her voice cracked. She had to fight to keep her eyes from closing as she examined Liam's body, drenched with other people's blood. Relief filled her when she was sure that there were no serious wounds.

"I'm glad...you weren't hurt..." she whispered. Her eyes closed and the chunk of rock she was holding fell from her hand. As she lost consciousness, there was a faint smile on her face.

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## Chapter 175

### Chapter 175 — After The Battle

"Haban, it hurts," Mura complained, and Haban set aside the bottle of medicine in his hand and immediately came to her to examine the bandage wrapped around her middle again.

"Are you in a lot of pain?" He asked. "Do you want me to give you a massage?"

"Yes...my legs..."

"Of course."

After her stomach was pierced, Mura had been unconscious for a full day. But as might be expected of a strong Kurkan woman, the next day she began to recover quickly. Haban thoroughly massaged her legs.

He had been saved from losing an arm during the battle, thanks to Genin's quick action in blocking an attack. But Genin herself was down as well, having broken a bone. Though many Kurkans were seriously injured, not one of them had died. All of them were recovering with characteristic rapidity.

Arguably, they could not have asked for a better result. Mura looked out the window, a worried expression on her face.

"The Queen..." She muttered. "Is there no change today?"

Haban paused in his massage.

"Yes," he replied in a low voice.

Jennie was an ordinary human. Despite her frail body, she had acted bravely, but she had paid a high price for it.

It had been a week since the day of the battle, and she was still unconscious. They could only hope that soon she would wake, even



as they became increasingly anxious. No doubt she needed time to heal, but they couldn't help but worry.

It was thanks to her that none of them had died. If Jennie had not intervened, no one could say how the fight against Cerdina might have ended. Morga had prepared a weapon for Liam to use at the critical moment when they disrupted Cerdina's spell, but she had recovered so much faster than any of them had expected. It had made things complicated.

In killing Jongin, Jennie had weakened Cerdina enough for the longsword to work. But without that second blow against her, it was not certain that they would have won the day. And even if they had, they would have taken many casualties.

Mura lowered her head, her eyes filled with guilt. No matter what the outcome, she should have stopped Jennie from doing something so dangerous.

"I don't deserve her," she muttered. "I am not good enough to be her lady-in-waiting."

Her eyes filled, and though she tried to hold back her tears, they finally overflowed. Haban silently held her as she began to sob.

"We'll wait a little longer, Mura," he said quietly.

"But—"

"I'm sure she will wake up," Haban interrupted firmly. His voice was filled with determination as he tried to reassure her. "Jennie is not the kind of person who would leave her mate behind."

\*\*\*

She had killed a person.

It was morally wrong, an act for which anyone should be condemned. The sensation of cutting into flesh with a dagger was vivid.

But Jennie had no remorse. Even if she could have gone back in time, she would have done the same thing. Death seemed a small punishment for Jongin, compared to everything she had suffered.

When it was all over, Jennie's strength left her and she fell into a deep sleep. In her dreams, there were no more chains, no more locks, no more iron doors.

And in the distance, she saw a small wolf, running free over a vast plain.

His silver fur ruffled in the wind. His golden eyes sparkled in the sun. He was completely healthy again.

She watched him running for some time before the cub finally noticed her. His ears pricked up and he charged over to her, leaping into her arms. She burst out laughing as she caught him, and the sound of her laughter filled the plain, so loud that it surprised her.

After that, she was unconscious again, for a long time. But the time finally came when she surfaced again, feeling someone gently caressing her.

The bittersweet smell of grass tickled her nose.

Slowly, Jennie opened her eyes, the way someone wakes after a good night's sleep.

Her head was resting on a firm thigh and a soft sheet was pulled up over her shoulders. Long fingers stroked her hair.

Jennie blinked as she felt fingers brush her eyelashes. Liam was stroking her cheeks, and she frowned at the tickling sensation.

"Wake up, Jennie," his deep voice urged her. "You've kept me waiting too long..."

Her drowsiness vanished like magic, and Jennie turned her head to look up. His golden eyes met hers.

Setting down his pipe, he exhaled a final stream of smoke and then lifted her up to sit her on his thighs.

Jennie leaned against his chest.

"... Liam."

Though she still felt a little shaky, she examined his body carefully. She remembered searching for injuries before she had fainted, but if he had had any, they were minor enough to have healed while she slept.

"Mura..." She remembered. "What happened to Mura?"

"Don't worry. She's recovering," Liam said sharply.

"Is this the time to be worrying about other people?"

"...Ahh."

His eyes shifted to her legs, and she looked with him at the motionless limbs, limp as the legs of a broken doll. When she tried to move them even a little, the stabbing pain was so sharp that tears sprang to her eyes.

She remembered how she had fallen when Cerdina's black smoke struck her. Something must have happened to her legs when she hit that wall.

"It will be about a week before you can move them," Liam said. "And you'll be at least a month before you can walk properly again."

His voice was cold, but Jennie met his eyes directly.

Liam was clenching his teeth as if he were biting words back, and then he silently reached and flipped up the skirt of her nightgown, baring her thighs.

Her eyes widened as she looked at the large wounds visible even beneath the thin bandages on each thigh.

"You will have scars," said Liam.

It looked as if the wounds had been stitched up while she slept, but even that pain hadn't awakened her.

She hadn't even realized she had been wounded.

Was it the black smoke that had cut her? Perhaps it was all the broken stone and glass shards on the floor of the Glory Room that had injured her. She had been focused on other things at the time, and her legs had been covered by the dress.

But the severity of the wounds frightened her. It was so much worse than she thought.

"The baby?" She asked urgently. But Liam didn't respond immediately. His mouth was stubbornly shut. "Liam?"

She was suddenly terrified of what he might say. It had seemed that the baby wolf was healthy when she had watched him tearing across those vast plains, but maybe something had happened to him since then.

Her gaze was fixed on Liam's mouth, willing him to speak.

"The baby is all right," he said after a long silence.

"Kurkans don't die so easily."

Jennie sighed with relief, but his face remained rigid with anger.

"But you are human," he said softly, and she felt her heart sink. Those brief words held powerful meaning. "I can recover quickly from any harm. You cannot."

He was not condemning her. It was a statement of fact.

"Don't leave me alone," he finished.

His face was grim. She almost apologized, unthinking, but then paused.

"...I won't," she said, reaching out to caress his cheek. "From now on, we will always be together."

He looked at her silently, and Jennie hesitated a moment and then stretched to kiss him lightly on the lips. Only then did Liam finally

relax.

Leaning back against his chest. She could feel his warmth as she listened to his heart beating. After a while, she plucked up the courage to ask.

"Cerdina...is she dead?"

It was a difficult question. She had to know what had happened to her. Surely, she must be dead. Cerdina had been even crueler than brave. Jennie only regretted that she hadn't been able to see Cerdina die with her own eyes.

But she looked at him with increasing nervousness at the hint of mischief in his eyes, and an equally mischievous smile.."She's escaped."

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**hi, i'm back :) can i get a hi too..?**

## Chapter 176

### Chapter 176 - Consequences

Cerdina had much in common with Estia.

She had been beautiful. Everyone considered her to be the fairest woman in the Empire. But no one would think so, looking at her now.

Cerdina came back to consciousness in an alley, and instead of the beautiful gowns she had always worn, there were only tattered rags. She had been stripped of her jewels and all her other splendid decorations.

As she rolled over in the filth of the alley, her eyes turned up to the sky. The black clouds were gone and white clouds were flecked against the blue sky like paint. Blankly, she gazed up at the picturesque view.

The pain that suddenly struck her was hellish.

Her red blood. Piercing screams. Overflowing rage.

Her body weakened as she convulsed, her eyes shaking wildly.

It would have been better if she had died.

She would rather have died. Her heart would have hurt less if she had died at Jongin's hands. She could do anything for her beloved son. She wouldn't have been afraid to give her body to him. She would have loved it if he had eaten her heart.

If she could have given everything she had to Jongin, she would have died in peace.

Tears slid down her cheeks and fell to the ground.

Cerdina gritted her teeth, her face hardening.

It couldn't end this way. Somehow, she would have vengeance. She

would kill Jennie before that barbarian's eyes, so he would know her despair. She wouldn't mind dying, after that.

She swore bloody vengeance as she gritted her teeth, but suddenly, a question came to her mind.

Why had the savage even let her go free?

He was a barbarian, cruel and brutal by nature. She hoped he had gotten his fill of torturing her, considering how much she had made Jennie suffer, but Cerdina couldn't believe he would let her go so easily.

Maybe she had slipped through his fingers somehow? Perhaps one of the Tomaris had spirited her away. Blood was thicker than water. Even if the barbarians had deceived them for a little while, perhaps the Tomaris had belatedly come to their senses.

Countless theories raced through her mind, even as the stink of rotting garbage filled her nose. First of all, she had to get out of there.

But it wasn't easy just to lift her body. Cerdina staggered, off balance without her arms, and fell back against the wall as she caught her breath. But then she realized that she was being ridiculous.

She was behaving like a pathetic human.

Cerdina smiled bitterly. It would be hard to draw a magic pattern without her arms, but she could still use her power. In an instant, black smoke billowed out from her body, but the instant she confidently reached out with her power, something happened.

"...Argh!"

Vomiting blood, she collapsed to the floor. It had been so hard just to get up off the ground, and now she had fallen again. The black smoke swirling around her disappeared.

Her power wouldn't work properly, and suddenly she remembered the long sword the barbarian had stabbed into her body. She clearly remembered its strange, dark red color, and the burning agony she

had felt when the blade pierced her.

What if...

Cerdina turned pale. Again, she tried to raise her power, and again, but nothing happened. The smoke rose up only to drift apart in the air.

That longsword had been forged with the blood of mutants. When it entered her body, that god-like power had vanished like a dream. Magically, it was as if she had mutant blood flowing through her veins now, diluted to the level of a weak sorcerer, fit for nothing but simple potions.

Lying on the ground, Cerdina cried out.

She sobbed, and no one even turned to look at her.

After an endless period of madness, nothing had changed at all.

Reflexively, Cerdina grabbed for her arms with both hands, only to find there were no arms, there were no hands, it was only thoughts, automatic and futile reflex.

".....!"

Her body wouldn't move the way she wanted it to, and Cerdina looked at herself with trembling eyes.

Where her arms were supposed to be, there were only scars from where they had been ripped away.

The pain was a phantom pain from limbs that were not there.

Cold sweat poured down her face at the agony of the missing limbs. One by one, she recalled the events that had happened before she collapsed, the memories flashing through her mind.

Staggering back to her feet, Cerdina walked on, looking at her surroundings. The distant sound of music caught her attention, the sound of voices singing, and she headed toward them.



Approaching with difficulty, she leaned against a wall and watched a group of Tomaris gathered together, chattering merrily. But as soon as they saw Cerdina, they went still. She forced a smile.

"Brothers and sisters..." Her voice was dry and squeaking. She hadn't had even a sip of water in so long. Cerdina lifted the corners of her mouth, whispering. "Help me."

The Tomaris looked at her in dismay.

"You must pay for your sins," a Toma man said after a while.

The corners of her mouth twitched. She wanted to slap him to teach him his place, but that was impossible. She fought to hold back her anger.

"You would rather follow the barbarians than someone of your own blood?!"

"You were the one who betrayed us first."

"Shut up!"

She ended up shouting anyway. The thought of having to bow down to these lowly creatures and ask for help was unbearable. Once she regained her power, she would trample them beneath her feet.

Shooting them a look filled with malice, she walked away, unaware that they were watching her and clicking their tongues as she staggered off. But that was only the beginning of her difficulties.

Cerdina had been a noblewoman all her life. She could never have imagined how a normal woman could survive on the streets of the capital, let alone a woman without arms. It was the first time she had ever experienced hardship.

Cerdina never imagined that just living could be so difficult.

All night long, she shivered, tormented with cold.

When she could no longer bear her hunger, she ate food that had fallen in the street. Strangers looked at her with pity.

She didn't even have a blanket to protect herself from the cold. It was a rat-like existence, obsessed with food, and she suffered phantom pains in her amputated arms again and again.

There came a day when the streets were crowded with people. Cerdina had found a bit of moldy bread and was eating it quickly from the ground; she could not even pick it up, without arms. Only once it was gone did she lift her head to see what was happening.

All the people were waving small banners, cheering and tossing flower petals into the air. A band marched by, playing music as they went.

Cerdina moved to a discreet corner where she could watch, chewing her lower lip. Her eyes were bloodshot.

The cries of the people swelled louder and louder, and a carriage appeared, drawn by six white horses.

It was a triumphal progress, and the people were cheering for Jennie de Estia, the new Queen of Estia.

Her silver hair was dazzling in the sunlight. There was a crown on her head, and a red cape with the royal crest of Estia embroidered on its back fell from her shoulders. When she smiled at the crowd, they cheered wildly for their beautiful Queen.

"Wow!!!"

Amidst the outpouring of joy, Cerdina huffed. That glorious crown, the red cape, the royal palace and that silver hair...all those things belonged to Jongin.

Jennie had stolen all of it from him and was smiling nonchalantly. Cerdina's eyes bored into her.

It happened then. Jennie was waving to the crown when suddenly her head turned, and through the masses of people, their gazes met.

Cerdina's eyes widened. She shrieked curses, but the words were covered by the cheers, and there was no hope of making her way through the crowd.

For a moment, Jennie stared, taking in Cerdina's pathetic appearance, then turned away.

She was treating her as if Cerdina was worthless.

Fury roared up through her, and Cerdina screamed.

But suddenly there was a blow to the back of her head, and she dropped instantly into unconsciousness.

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A splash of cold water woke her up, and Cerdina regained her senses, dripping with icy water.

Shivering, she looked around. It was a very familiar place.

She was in a large hall with the royal flag of Estia hanging overhead, and at the end of the great hall, two marble columns stood on either side of a throne on a high dais.

Jennie was seated on the golden throne, looking down at the kneeling Cerdina.

"Long time no see," she said.

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## Chapter 177

### Chapter 177 - Painful Death

Quietly, Jennie looked down on her from above. She was dressed so elegantly, anyone who saw her would have known her for royalty. The barbarian king stood beside her, leaning casually against the throne.

He wore an expression of disinterest, but when he looked at Cerdina, he smiled.

Before she flew into a rage at his contemptuous attitude, Cerdina suddenly looked down at herself.

Not only was she not dressed properly, she wasn't even washed.

Gone was the beauty that she had always been so proud of. Her face had aged, as if all her years had fallen on her at once. Cerdina smiled bitterly. Only now did she realize how far she had fallen.

Looking up at Jennie was like looking up from the bottom of an abyss. It was miserable to see the woman who had stolen away everything she had ever wanted, and there was nothing of her pride left. It had shattered into fragments, and pierced her heart like shards of glass.

Cerdina decided she had had enough.

She sank her teeth into her tongue.

Determined to die, and they would not even let her do that. Her suicide attempt was stopped immediately, Kurkans rushing over to her and forcing her mouth open. Cerdina screamed as blood spurted from her mouth.

"Kill me! I'd rather die!!!"

It would be better to die than to continue this humiliation. She wanted to die. Above her, she saw Jennie suddenly bite her lip, and for a moment, Cerdina felt a faint hope that it might have been out of

pity.

It was a useless fantasy.

Jennie was remembering another day like this, the day Cerdina had brought her back from the desert.

Cerdina looking down on her, filled with arrogance. Jennie had fought to the end, even begged to be killed, but Cerdina had not hesitated to force a potion down her throat and cast her spell.

Now it was Cerdina begging to die. Their fortunes had reversed. Kneeling, Cerdina felt her legs go numb, and with her humiliation complete, she could do nothing but look at the person who controlled her fate.

Jennie's beautiful purple eyes shone like jewels. In spite of all the torment Cerdina had visited on her, those eyes had not lost their luster. If anything, that glow had only sharpened, like iron forged into steel.

Those were eyes that no evil words, no spells, no malignant powers had been able to destroy.

A thrill of fear went through Cerdina.

It was an emotion she had never felt before. Fear of the person that she had held in her hands all her life, and suddenly she was filled with indescribable shame.

Jennie looked at her calmly.

"Why should I be so merciful?" She asked, with perfect composure. "You never offered it to me."

Cerdina's lips moved silently, searching for something to say, but in the end she could only close her mouth. There was nothing she could say.

The new Queen of Estia pronounced her sentence.

"You will die. Painfully."

That was the end.

Many Kurkans had been waiting quietly in the shadows, and now they moved forward, laughing.

They approached Cerdina with smiles and expressions of utter delight. The sight of dozens of savages converging on her at once made Cerdina's eyes go round with terror. Like prey, scenting the hunters.

A woman with an expressionless face caught Cerdina by the waist.

"I'll take Jennie away," said Liam, speaking for the first time. He smiled, his eyes narrowing as he looked at Cerdina. "Save a bit for me, Genin."

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After taking Jennie back to her room, Liam had told her to go ahead and go to bed, but Jennie couldn't sleep. Sitting back against the back of the bed, she drew back the curtain to look out the window. On the thin branches outside, new buds were growing.

Slowly, the royal palace was greening again. The spell that had covered it had been broken.

With Cerdina's power weakened, the Kurkan sorcerers, led by Morga, had finally been able to break the spell. But instantly, chaos had erupted.

A Tomari woman had managed to conceal her identity and place her child, who was no part of the royal family, on the throne of Estia. It was an event that would never be forgotten in all the history of the continent. The nobles of Estia could not believe that they had been so deceived by the Tomaris.

Jennie had led the bewildered nobles in restoring the ruined Estia. And confused though they were, they naturally followed her.

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## Chapter 178

### Chapter 178 - Untitled

As all of this was happening, Seokjin had disappeared. Publicly, he was declared missing, but Jennie suspected there was something more.

Perhaps because lately Liam had been so happy. It seemed likely that the Kurkans had spirited him away.

Though she still despised the man, Jennie didn't want to see his end. She left the matter in Liam's hands.

After settling a few other matters, she formally took the throne. It was the only logical thing to do; she was the last member of the royal family left in the succession. None of the nobles who had been under Cerdina's spell dared to object.

If it had not been for her, they would have lived the rest of their lives as Cerdina's puppets and slaves.

But they did not support Jennie out of gratitude, or any sense of obligation. The Estian nobility was not so pure-hearted.

It was because Jennie was backed by the Kurkans.

Everyone knew that Jennie was the Queen of Kurkan. The hulking individuals roaming the palace were sufficient to intimidate, and no one dared to treat Jennie lightly.

The Kurkans had decided to remain in Estia until after the baby was born, and had time to grow a little. Only a few of them had returned to the desert to spread the news of their victory.

Just because our prince wasn't born in the desert doesn't mean he is not a Kurkan.

Liam declared that the most important thing was Jennie's health. This way she would have a safe childbirth.

Sitting on her bed and looking out the window, suddenly Jennie smiled. In the past, when she looked out that window, she had had to suppress the urge to jump. But now she just felt free. She could even go out on the balcony if she wanted to, and feel nothing but peace.

But it would have been difficult to actually go, because her legs were not yet completely healed.

Sitting still, there was still a little pain, and she could barely support herself with a cane when she walked.

The pain would go away in time; she just had to quietly wait. But she worried about the scars.

Liam looked sick every time he saw her wounds. She could see his eyes darkening, even though he never said anything. He would likely suffer for many years to come, every time he saw her scarred legs.

Jennie wished desperately that the marks would fade away. She applied ointment regularly and did everything she could to help the wounds to heal.

Tugging up the skirt of her nightgown, she looked at the healing gashes through their thin bandages. For a long time, she looked down at the wounds, frowning, but quickly pulled the skirt back down when she heard the door open.

The smell of blood reached her nose first. Liam's hair was as wet as if he had just washed it, and Jennie didn't ask the man who had returned reeking of blood what he had been doing.

"Is she dead?" She asked briefly.

"No," Liam replied, sweeping his hand through his wet hair.

Seated on the bed, Jennie reached out to him. It was difficult for her to get up by herself.

Letting out a small sigh, Liam approached and laid her down on the bed, carefully avoiding her legs.

Gently, he bit her neck, and when Jennie pushed him away at the



tickling sensation, he just licked at the place he had bitten with his tongue.

"There are many things I still want to do," Liam said as he kissed her neck. "But if you don't like it, I can kill her immediately."

Jennie smiled a little, pushing him gently away by the shoulders. In his golden eyes was an implacable cruelty that he could never satiate, but Jennie loved even his cruel side. Their eyes caught, gazing, and they moved together in an instinctive kiss. Jennie's lips parted in a soft whisper.

"...Do whatever you want."

Instead of responding, he only kissed her again, for a long while.

"Why weren't you sleeping?" he asked, when he finally stopped.

"I just didn't feel like it."

Somehow, she was still afraid that when she woke up, all of this would turn out to be a dream. She could only feel safe sleeping next to Liam. But of course, she wasn't going to admit that. She only hugged him tighter.

Instantly, her mind relaxed, and drowsiness began to overtake him. Looking at Liam with drooping eyes, she struggled to keep them open.

"Liam."

"Tell me, Jennie."

"Tell me...the baby's name."

Liam smiled faintly and kissed Jennie's forehead as her eyes closed.

"I didn't know you were wondering about that."

Of course she was. Whenever she was alone, she had thought about their baby's name. But she had decided to keep the question to herself, though she knew Liam would have answered if she asked

him.

The reason she had waited to ask was simple: she didn't want to ask until after it was all over.

Today seemed like a good day. Jennie had seen Cerdina with her own eyes. She probably wasn't dead yet; from now on, she would be in the hands of the Kurkans. She would only be allowed to die when Liam had been satisfied.

Jennie would never have to look at her again. Cerdina had vanished from her life.

And now that the hard journey was over, she wanted to hear the name. Laying her hand on her swollen belly, she could feel the warmth of the life inside her against the palm of her hand.

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## Chapter 179

### Chapter 179 - Baby's Name

"Leo." Liam whispered. "I don't think it sounds bad..." He continued as Jennie listened, and quickly added, "but if you don't like it, we can name our baby something else."

He actually looked a little nervous. And Jennie didn't dare to answer quickly or thoughtlessly, though she knew he was anxious for her response. Perhaps he had been thinking of this name for too long, and by himself, since Jennie had lost her memory. Only he had known she was pregnant with his child...and had been choosing the name for their baby ever since.

Her heart ached, thinking of everything he had endured.

"I like it," she said, her voice quivering.

He lifted a skeptical eyebrow.

"I really do. I really like it," she assured him, and took his hand to lay it on her belly. "Tell it to the baby."

He blinked in surprise, cautiously stroking as he looked down at her rounded belly.

"...your name..." He began stiffly, "is...Leo."

Jennie couldn't help laughing, and reached to wrap her arms around him. It defied all logic that such a big man could be so adorable. She rubbed her face against his chest.

"But Kurkans do not inherit the throne," she mused as they lay together. The heir to the Kurkan throne would be determined by power, but Liam had already considered how their baby's name would sound with the royal Kan.

Liam smiled.

"You should not worry. This is our child." He was as convinced as if

all of this was predestined. Liam kissed her forehead. "You already know that our child will be very brave."

Jennie thought of the little wolf she had seen in her dreams, and how enormous it grew when it howled.

"You're right..." She murmured. Whether the cub was a boy or a girl, it would surely inherit the throne.

Jennie laid her hand gently on Liam's, still caressing her belly. She fell asleep imagining the three of them together.

It was a peaceful sleep where even nightmares would not dare to approach her.

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For the past few days, the capital of Estia had been bright and sunny, and the sky was clear today, without a single cloud. With the midday sun streaming through the window, Jennie was carefully inspecting a document.

She studied it for a long time before she picked up her quill to sign it. The black words were stark, engraved against the white paper.

**[Jennie De Estia.]**

After she had signed, she set her quill aside and read the document again. She had already read it many times, but it was worth rereading. Lifting her eyes, she motioned to Liam, who was standing in front of her desk.

Liam snatched up the delicately patterned quill. It was a quill Jennie often used, but it looked so fragile in his hand, as if it might snap in two at any moment.

"Here?"

Jennie nodded, and he scrawled his name next to her signature.

**[Liam.]**

Though his script had improved, it was still a little rough. Jennie beamed as she lifted the marriage certificate, now complete with both their signatures.

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## Chapter 180

### Chapter 180 - Complete Happiness

Now, under the laws of Estia, their marriage was formally recognized. Liam smiled a little at the joy in Jennie's face.

"Let's go," he said, tapping a finger on the desk.

Jennie tried to reach for the cane beside the desk, but he picked her up in one arm before she could rise, and snatched up the cane with the other.

"You have a good husband," he told her.

Normally, she didn't use her husband as a means of transportation, but Jennie just wrapped her arms around his neck quietly. She knew it upset him to see her hobbling on a cane.

Today, they would go out together. As Jennie had planned their outing, Liam had no idea where they were going.

They climbed into the carriage already waiting for them, and though it was the roomiest carriage at the palace, it still felt a little cramped with Liam inside.

Jennie tugged a black handkerchief from her pocket.

"Can you cover your eyes?"

"Why?"

"Don't you want to?"

"...it's all right," he said, covering his eyes with his hands instead of taking the handkerchief. Watching his small, amused smile, Jennie fiddled with the box in her pocket, and long enough that a perceptive man might notice the noise. Then she slipped her hand from her pocket and turned away, as if nothing had happened.

The carriage pulled away from the palace, and Jennie swallowed

dryly as she watched the landscape rolling by the window. She was so nervous, her heart was pounding, and suddenly she worried that Liam might hear that, too.

After a long ride, the carriage arrived at a place on the outskirts of the capital. A familiar landscape was waiting there, and the coachman stopped the carriage where Jennie had instructed him beforehand.

"We have arrived," Jennie said, reaching to tug Liam's hands down. He stepped from the carriage first and then stopped, turning to look at the place.

Without saying a word, he turned back to Jennie to hold her in his arms, and Jennie hugged him back as he plucked her from the carriage and turned to walk slowly away, leaving it behind.

The field of eulalies was endless. The flowers swayed in the breeze as they walked into the field, and after Liam had gone a fair distance, Jennie tapped him on the shoulder.

Carefully, he set her down, and though she staggered a little as she caught her balance, she managed to stay on her feet without the cane they had left back in the carriage. In the middle of the field of eulalies, they faced each other, and Jennie's hair rippled with the flowers before the breath of the wind. Liam could only look at the glow of her hair in the sunlight.

He had been unusually quiet all day, and silent since they got out of the carriage. Usually he would have teased her by now, or said something naughty. It made her even more nervous, and her lips felt as if they had been glued together.

"...I want to..."

Her voice sounded strange. Jennie cleared her throat and tried again.

"I want to have a proper wedding with you."

With trembling hands, she pulled the box from her pocket and opened the lid for him. The velvet-lined box contained two rings side by side. Liam's eyes fixed on them, staring, and then slowly lifted to

her.

Jennie took several deep breaths.

"Marry me."

The wind rose again in the silence.

"What if I don't want to?" Liam asked with a smile.

"...That's not an option!"

Jennie's face heated as she glared up at him, outraged. She had done her best to plan all of this and then plucked up the courage to propose...

"If I refuse, will you force me?" Liam asked, clearly suppressing his laughter.

Jennie lifted her chin.

"I will if I have to," she told him, filled with dignity.

"This time, I'll ruin your life."

Liam burst out laughing, and the sound rolled out to fill the field of eulalies. Once he recovered, he took the box from her hand and slid the silver ring onto his finger, then plucked out the golden ring. Taking her hand, he slipped the small ring onto her ring finger.

"All right," he agreed, lifting her hand to his lips.

"Destroy me, Jennie."

Then he yanked her into him by her hand, and she stumbled forward, off-balance as he caught her. His arms tightened around her waist.

"I will be by your side for the rest of my life."

His golden eyes glowed so brightly, Jennie immediately slid her arms around her neck, transfixed. Then she kissed the man with the beast-like eyes, and thought that she finally knew what it was, to be completely happy.



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**End of Volume 1.**

## Volume 2. Chapter 181

### Volume 2

#### Chapter 181 — Leo

In a garden, a small boy with light brown skin ran on light feet.

His curling silver hair glistened in the sun, and swiveled around as a butterfly caught his attention, fluttering ahead of him. Maids watching nearby laughed as they saw him dart by after the insect. He was so adorable, they couldn't help themselves.

The boy flashed a smile in their direction at the laughter, but did not take his eyes from his quarry.

Patiently, he stalked the butterfly through the garden until it landed on a flower some ten paces away.

The boy bit his lower lip. His golden eyes glittered as they focused on his prey. His breathing slowed as he crept forward, his footsteps making no sound. But just as his golden eyes flashed, glowing with intent, someone called out to him.

"Leo!"

The boy turned to find a tall, thin man behind him, his long hair tied back in a ponytail. Bending, the man picked Leo up in his arms.

"You shouldn't be out alone," he admonished.

"Buffy, Momo!" He exclaimed, pointing at his prey.

"Look, buffy!"

Morga bit his lips at the nickname, trying to keep back his laughter. He was the worthy chief of the Snake Tribe, and he should not be seen laughing like a child.

"One must not kill without reason," he told the little boy sternly. "The

more blood stains your hands, the more you will be consumed by the instincts of a beast. Only kill when you are in danger."

"Danger?"

"Do you understand, my prince?"

"Yes, Momo," Leo replied, nodding his small head.

Morga looked at him with satisfaction.

Young Kurkans didn't know how to control their savage nature. Their behavior tended to betray the fact that they were not human. It wouldn't have been a problem, if they were in the desert, but in the royal palace of Estia, the young Prince needed to be taught early how to restrain himself before humans.

Liam himself had asked Morga to teach his son.

Mura also watched over Leo occasionally, but since she was Queen Jennie's lady-in-waiting, she did not have as much time to devote to the Prince. Every time she heard Morga had had time alone with Leo, Mura could only stamp her feet with envy.

"I couldn't give up Jennie, but I can't give up Leo..." She had sighed. But if she were forced to choose, Mura would choose Jennie. She still cooked all the Kurkan foods that the Queen liked, and in any dangerous situation, she became her guard.

After Jennie had been injured in the fight with Cerdina, Mura had felt that she had found her destiny. Jennie became the second-most important person in her life, after Haban. Mura knew that her loyalty to Jennie even exceeded her loyalty to Liam.

That was why Morga shouldered most of the responsibility for looking after the Prince. Among all the Kurkans, he alone had this honor. Morga was very proud of it.

"Prince."

Despite his strict lessons, Morga had ways of keeping the little boy's love. Casting a simple spell, Morga blew black smoke into the air,

and then turned into butterflies.

"Momo!" Leo exclaimed. "Bufflies! Momo made bufflies!"

He threw his arms around Morga's neck, beaming.

"I love Momo!"

Momo had to cover his mouth with the back of his hand, his shoulders shaking with repressed laughter.

This time it was impossible to maintain his stern bearing. A smile broke irresistibly and he looked quickly around, then hugged the little Prince back.

"I can show you many amazing spells," he said.

"What else do you want to look at?"

"Wolf!"

Morga knew very well what kind of wolf Leo wanted to see. The skilled magician blew out more smoke and shaped into a small silver wolf that ran through the air.

"That's me!" Leo's small chest swelled with pride.

"He looks like me!"

"You are even better than a wolf."

"Wolves are best," Leo told him firmly.

"That is true," Morga was forced to agree. He knew how hard this little cub had fought to live in the Queen's womb. "Let's go back to the palace," he said.

"I'll read you your book."

Though Morga would have liked to carry the young prince in his arms, he set Leo down on the floor, to strengthen the prince's independence, and then took his hand to walk together.

"Where's mama?" Leo asked, looking up at him.

"The Queen is at a Cabinet Council meeting."

"What's that?"

"That's a meeting where many very important matters of the kingdom are discussed."

"Want to see mama," Leo complained, his silver eyebrows frowning.

"You'll just have to wait a little longer."

"No, I want mama, I'm sad now. I'm going to cry."

His eyes gleamed ominously.

"I want mama right now!"

Pulling his hand from Morga's, Leo darted away at an impressive speed for a child, leaving Morga no choice but to run after him.

"My prince, you're going to fall!" Morga shouted after him.

"Will not!" Leo shouted without looking back. "I found mama!"

Morga's eyebrows went up at this proclamation, but a moment later as he raced around a corner, he startled back in surprise.

"Leo!"

"Mama!"

Sure enough, the Queen was there, catching the prince in a hug as he flung himself at her. Morga smiled and politely greeted his queen, and then nodded to Mura behind her.

"Thank you, Morga," Jennie replied, generously informal, under the circumstances.

"It seems your meeting ended early," he replied. "I looked after His Highness while he was in the garden."

"It's good of you, Leo is so fond of you," she said, looking down at the small boy as she praised his tutor. Looking into the golden eyes that looked so much like Liam's, she patted his head. "How did you know Mama was here?"

"I was hunting!"

"He really is just like him..." Jennie murmured, embracing the little boy in her arms.

"Never," Morga objected. "Liam was terrible when he was a boy."

Jennie looked skeptical.

"Really," Morga said firmly. "I still remember it, I was in the middle of making a potion in the dark of night and he came creeping into my tent like an assassin..."

The Queen burst out laughing, looking at the small hunter in her arms, but the laugh ended with a sigh.

She was longing for Liam to come home, though she knew it wouldn't be for a while yet.

When would he come?

Liam had been away for months, leading his army to liberate the rest of the Kurkan slaves. One by one, they had been attacking the other countries nearby that had supported it.

The Kurkan army was strong, and the rest of the continent had grown soft in the long period of peace.

None of them could stand against the might of the Kurkan warriors.

The campaign would continue until every last Kurkan slave had been freed. And though it was not an easy task, it didn't seem as if it would take that long. Many kingdoms had instantly surrendered, fearing the results of a Kurkan invasion. Not only had they released the slaves back into Kurkan, they had also made efforts to establish friendly relations.

Liam's condition for peace was that they would have to join in punishing any kingdom that resisted him.

Only then would he grant them peace for the next five years.

As Jennie was thinking of Liam, Mura was quietly reporting what she had heard at that day's meeting.

"Emissaries are coming from the kingdom of Balkat."

"For a peace agreement?"

"Yes. They promised to bring the former slaves directly here. We'll need sorcerers here to perform their coming-of-age ceremony immediately."

"I will make the preparations."

Mentally, Morga tallied up the sorcerers available as he looked back at Queen Jennie. With the worst of Estia's problems resolved, she had become much brighter, and for a time, she had even smiled. It was natural that she would become somber again, with her husband away.

"Perhaps we ought to have a victory celebration, when the King returns?" He said slowly.

Of course, the campaign was not yet complete.

Victory was not yet achieved. But knowing Liam, it was natural. Inevitable.

Jennie was the only one who could defeat him.

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## Chapter 182

### Chapter 182 — Herben Kingdom

The sound of battle horns echoed over the plain. The ground shook under the hooves of the galloping horses.

Behind them rose a cloud of crows, cawing in the sky. It was enough to make a cold sweat run down the spine of the Knight Commander of Herben, though he looked forward at his enemy with dignity, setting aside his unease.

Through the dust rising on the plain, he could see the barbarian army approaching. They came without hesitation, and stopped at the instant their general did.

It was incredible to see such discipline, the vast force moving as if they were a single creature. For a moment, the Knight Commander was so impressed, he forgot that this was the enemy he was meant to fight.

They looked like an invincible army. A terrible army to have as an enemy.

The Knight Commander did not believe his soldiers could defeat them. In fact, he had no intention of fighting a battle. Signaling for his soldiers to remain in formation, he spurred his horse forward.

His eyes were locked on the man who stood at the front of the opposing force, a man who towered even above a crowd of Kurkans. Surely, he was the Barbarian King.

The Knight Commander watched the savage as he approached. He had heard the man's name was Liam, and the name suited him. The rumors had said he was a handsome man, with stunning golden eyes. His muscular body was a weapon in itself, and he would certainly be a powerful fighter.

But the Knight Commander relied on his own practical experience. No matter how powerful someone's physique, there were some skills



that could only be acquired with years of experience. The Knight Commander was hailed as a genius. Even if he couldn't stop the advancing army, he was sure he could halt a single savage.

"Barbarian King," the Knight Commander said, and drew his sword. "If you have any honor, then you will fight me with honor."

That meant a challenge to a duel, one on one. The loud declaration was received with silence. The Knight Commander clenched his sword and lifted it.

"Come on!" He shouted.

Laughter erupted from the listening Kurkans, and his face darkened.

The Kurkans weren't even doing it to provoke him. It was a spontaneous reaction.

"Oh, my God..." Haban gasped, almost falling off his horse with laughter. "I think he's serious..."

Liam said nothing, only smiled. It seemed that the Knight Commander of Herban thought highly of his own martial arts.

But even if he was extraordinary, every Kurkan present was an experienced warrior. The Knight Commander might know his own trade, but he knew little of Kurkans. Most of the Kurkans he had seen were slaves, who had not yet come of age.

It was a plausible excuse for this recklessness.

But still, it wasn't a bad proposal. This would speed up his own return home. Liam drew his own sword with pleasure, nudging his horse over to his challenger.

The Knight commander eyed Liam, assessing. There was a slight frown on his face as he noted Liam's lack of nerves.

"Now it will be your turn with that Estian succubus," he said, provoking. "I wonder who her next husband will be."

Liam sighed, rubbing a hand over his face.

"...Ha."

A glint shone in his golden eyes. He knew this was just a ploy to goad him and make him lose his temper, but he couldn't help reacting.

Jennie had become famous after all the curious events surrounding her multiple marriages. There were all manner of crazy rumors, one of which claimed she was a succubus, beguiling and slaying her husbands.

It was true that those men who had tried to marry her had died. Not just Count Seokjin, but Prince Jongin after him.

There were people who were convinced that soon it would be the Barbarian King's turn, right up until Liam killed them.

Liam couldn't understand why anyone would consider the men who had tormented her to be her victims, and he wasn't interested in trying.

In these cases, Liam went for the simplest method.

Rather than trying to explain it with words, he would prove it. He was nearly nose to nose with the Knight Commander, and the other man was clearly discomfited at the difference in size.

"I assume you intend to back up those words."

"Insolence!" The Knight Commander shouted, loud and aggressive to cover up his own flicker of fear.

Lifting his sword, he charged at Liam.

He gave another loud shout as he swung it, but it was already too late. Blood splashed onto the ground, and as Liam lowered his own sword, two things thumped onto the ground. The first was a broken sword, and the second...

"Agghhhh!"

It was the right arm of the Knight Commander, who toppled off his horse, screaming as his blood poured onto the ground.

Liam watched emotionlessly as the man wormed across the ground, and Haban nudged her horse over to hand him a cigar. Liam smoked half of it before he tossed the remaining stub in the maimed man's direction.

"Genin."

"Command me, my King."

"Cut out his tongue and stuff it down his throat."

Immediately, Genin unsheathed her sword. The Knight Commander cringed back, trying to squirm away, and Liam laughed to see all his bravado evaporate.

"One must take responsibility for one's words."

\*\*\*

They had broken the last line of defense. All that remained was to march on the royal palace of Herben. The Kurkans who had made camp near the capital were preparing for the final battle.

"I hear many have already fled."

"We will probably return home in a couple weeks."

"Yes."

Haban stared at Liam. Liam held a single rose in his hand, with a further pile of them beside him, which had already had all their thorns removed. Each time his small dagger flashed, more thorns disappeared.

Liam had frequently entertained himself this way whenever they were in camp.

"Are you planning to give those to the Queen?" Haban couldn't help asking curiously. "It will still be a while before we return to Estia. Those roses will have wilted by then."

"I'm just practicing for when we return." Liam smiled, examining the

stem for any remaining thorns. "I will only give her the most beautiful roses."

He could have ordered his subordinates to remove the thorns, but Liam wanted to do it personally. He was wealthy enough that he could buy her anything, but there was no money in the world that could compel him to attend to such details for anyone but her.

Distracted by the sight of his King trimming flowers, Haban went on with his report.

"It is said that the Kingdom of Cha will be sending emissaries to Estia, escorting their freed Kurkan slaves. Their King will come to negotiate peace. His Queen will accompany him."

Liam smiled again. It made him remember his negotiations with Jennie, back when he had come as the King of Kurkan to negotiate peace with Estia.

"It may just be gossip..." Haban added, frowning slightly. "But it's likely that the Kingdom of Cha is playing a deeper game."

The former King of Cha had died young, of an illness. As he was childless, his younger brother had inherited the throne, and accepted his brother's wife as his Queen, according to the customs of that kingdom.

By all accounts, it was a loveless marriage. Yet despite the rumors of their estrangement, now they suddenly wanted to come to Estia as a couple.

"They are both said to seek many partners," Haban added. "I am afraid they might be trying to make some mischief."

Liam lowered the rose in his hand.

"Meaning?"

"Well...Estia and Kurkan are only united by marriage."

Kurkan had been able to establish multiple outposts on the continent because of Estia, and Estia was quickly becoming a powerful state

under the protection of Kurkan. But that solid partnership between the kingdoms only existed because of Jennie and Liam's marriage.

"It seems that Cha means to try to break up the alliance..."

Haban hesitated, and then said what he did not want to say.

"There is some speculation that they will try to seduce you, or your Queen."

---

## Chapter 183

### Chapter 183 — Liam Takes Over Her Mind

The hand that had been busily trimming away thorns stopped. Liam frowned.

But Haban wasn't done.

"Both the King and Queen are reputed to possess great beauty," he went on.

There was a strong possibility that they would have attempted to break up Liam and Jennie's marriage even absent political motivation, to satisfy their own pleasure.

Liam slowly lowered his rose to the ground. Haban, sensing that time was almost up, hastened to offer the last and most dangerous tidbit.

"Also, the King of Cha was one of Queen Jennie's suitors."

The King's offer for her hand had failed because of Seokjin, at the time. But now the situation had changed, and even though Liam and Jennie were married, that made no difference among nobility.

The King of Cha must surely have heard rumors of Jennie's great beauty. If he were to see her in person, he would certainly attempt to seduce her. Liam's frown deepened as he thought of his wife. Jennie, the most beautiful woman in the world.

It had been too long since he had been home. And he would have liked to quietly spend time with his family when he returned, but now he was going to have to get rid of trash. Liam felt wretched, thinking of the little time he would have to enjoy his family.

"If they hadn't bought Kurkan slaves in the first place, they would never be allowed to set foot on Estian soil," Liam said, flipping his dagger over in his hand and spinning it between his fingers. His face was expressionless as he thought, the blade of the dagger glittering as it spun in the air.

Catching it, he tossed it again, and then finally stopped.

"Three days," he said.

Haban blinked. He was sure he must have misheard.

"What...?" He asked incredulously.

"We'll go back in three days."

He had compressed a fifteen-day plan into a long weekend. Liam rose.

"Bring me my scimitar," he ordered. Haban's mouth was still hanging open. "Today we will take the capital of Herben."

\*\*\*

Leo was already half asleep.

His eyes were drowsy as he looked up at his mother, and Jennie stroked his soft hair.

"Night night, mama..." He mumbled, with a sleepy smile, and drifted off. Jennie and kissed him on his forehead before she slipped out of the room.

The royal family's rooms had changed, since the Kurkans had moved into the palace of Estia, and many places were decorated in that style. The rooms Jennie shared with Liam looked very like the rooms in the palace of Kurkan, with fine fabrics separating the spaces. There were colorfully patterned cushions, low chairs, braziers, and many pipes for smoking, all brought by Liam.

He often would go and sit on the railing of the balcony, with one of his long pipes between his fingers. As she approached the bed, she could remember everything about him, and the empty bed seemed too large. Slowly, she pulled back the sheets, and found them cold.

It never felt that way when he was there. Wherever Liam was, it was always so warm.

Turning from the bed, Jennie went instead to a small table where documents were piled and waiting for her. She meant to go through them before she went to sleep, but it was hard to concentrate. Her mind was elsewhere.

He's still so far away.

Only a few days before, she had received news of the fall of the kingdom of Herben. Given the distance the messenger bird had traveled, she knew it would take a week at least just to travel, and that didn't include all the things he would have to do, to leave people in charge of the government after conquering the kingdom.

Ten days at least.

Jennie set down the sheaf of papers, trying to push those thoughts aside. Draping a scarf over her shoulders, she decided to take a walk in the garden.

As she gave herself a glance in the long mirror, a smile suddenly curved her lips.

Her face flushed. Everywhere she looked, there were traces of Liam. She remembered him with everything she saw. Even that long mirror reminded her of her husband.

*It had been the day before Leo was born, and Jennie had been murmuring distractedly to herself, all the things she had read that a new mother needed to know.*

*"...difficult for the baby to latch on and drink, if the nipples are hard..."*

*The books said she ought to rub them before delivery to soften them, but it wasn't as easy as it sounded.*

*Jennie raised her hands to her breasts and then lowered them several times. It was just too embarrassing to do that to herself.*

*But at that moment, someone had arrived who would be perfectly willing to help her.*



*"Liam?"*

*Liam's eyebrows had risen at the sound of her voice.*

*Approaching Jennie, he set down the tray of snacks he had prepared on a table and then caught her chin in his large hand.*

*"What?" He asked, his eyes searching her face.*

*Jennie was too embarrassed to tell him. The silence stretched, and though she said nothing, Liam's gaze never moved from her face. He never forced her to do anything, but he was very insistent in matters that concerned her health.*

*Now that she was so heavily pregnant, he was adamant.*

*There had been so many risks and so many injuries that had weakened her, and she had not been very strong to begin with. Liam noticed every detail in her body, and could detect the slightest change.*

*It was clear that he suspected Jennie was hiding something from him, and she could not let him worry. When she finally cracked and confessed, Liam burst out laughing.*

*"Is there anyone who can touch you better than I?" He asked, cocking his head. "Or was there someone else you wanted to touch you?"*

*Jennie caught his hand.*

*"No, only you."*

*Liam's grin was wild and possessive as he squeezed her breasts through her clothes. Bending, he lowered his lips to her ear.*

*"Yes," he whispered. "I am the only one."*

*His fingers tweaked her nipple. It could not be considered a massage, or anything other than foreplay. Her body ignited at the pleasure of the sensation, and she moaned, unable to contain the sound.*

*"Ahh...ahhhh..."*

*Moans escaped her continually as Liam undressed her, gazing at her pale, swollen breasts for a long moment before he bent his head to kiss them.*

*Her nipples hardened. Liam rubbed them gently with his fingertips, tugging them with his index finger and thumb. Jennie tried to push him away, and he kissed her, soothing her. Their tongues twined together.*

*Suddenly, a strange, tingling sensation rippled through her body, and Jennie's shoulders trembled.*

*"Ahhh..."*

*Something was coming out of her. As she looked down in panic, she saw white liquid beading at the tip of her nipple.*

*It was milk.*

*Jennie was shocked. Even though it was natural, it was so embarrassing, she didn't see how she could ever get used to it.*

*Unlike Jennie, Liam just stared at the milk flowing from her breast, watching as it trickled over his fingers.*

*Jennie didn't understand why it felt so lascivious.*

*Maybe it was the heat of Liam's gaze, watching as the milk dribbled over his brown skin. It felt as if he were drinking it with his eyes, and her belly tightened inside as he brought his mouth to her breast.*

*"What are you doing...?!"*

*His lips closed and he sucked so hard on her nipple, she could hear the noise of his mouth, the sound of swallowing as he drank her down. Liam raised his eyes to her face and licked his lips, then licked her reddened nipple. Her face burned as he looked into her eyes.*

*"Give me more," he said.*

*She had tried to deal with this herself because she had known it would end up this way. Jennie caught his face in both her hands.*

*"No..." she whispered.*

*But Liam didn't listen. Angling his head, he sucked her other nipple, drinking.*

*"Why are you doing this?" Jennie asked, blushing so hard she was almost light-headed. Liam looked up at her without the slightest change in his face.*

*"As a father, I must make sure my child will feed well."*

*And he began to drink again. Jennie's thighs twitched, pressing together as she moaned involuntarily, covering her red face with her hands.*

*"You are beautiful, Jennie," he whispered.*

*She shook her head silently, and Liam quickly lifted her up.*

*"Will you believe me if I show you?"*

*Turning, he placed them both before the mirror in the corner of the room. Jennie's hand reached to touch its cool surface, and the warm body heat of Liam radiated behind her. His hand lifted to cup her breasts, caressing.*

*"Let's do this here."*

*Jennie's eyes widened and her face flushed as she looked at her naked self in the mirror.*

*"Beautiful, right?" Liam whispered to his shocked wife.*

*His rigid manhood rubbed against her buttocks, moistened by the liquid flowing from his cock Liam caught her chin and turned her face up, covering her mouth with his.*

*The head of his manhood pushed into her opening as they kissed with growing passion, gently entering her. Her waist lifted involuntarily, and a sigh of pleasure escaped.*

*His manhood, thick as a forearm, did not push all the way inside her. The shallow penetration was all the more maddening.*

*Jennie moved, trying to cool down the heat overwhelming her, pushing instinctively closer to the cool surface of the mirror. As her breasts stroked*

*against it, more milk dribbled out, streaking the glass.*

*"Oh!"*

*Jennie drew back quickly, but the milk was already sliding down the mirror. Her face turned crimson with mortification.*

*"Liam...please..."*

*"Are you embarrassed?" He asked, biting her ear.*

*"Should I add mine there?"*

*He was ready to pull his manhood out of her to add his own fluids to the surface, and tears filled her eyes at this touching consideration. Jennie shook her head frantically.*

*He squeezed her breasts, forcing more milk to flow from them, even as his manhood stroked gently into her. It was so strange to feel both sensations at once.*

*Her vision blurred with pleasure. It felt as if her head was about to explode. Jennie couldn't hold back any longer, and the moaning plea escaped her lips.*

*"Stop...ahhhh..."*

*But even though she told him to stop, her hips were still moving, and Liam let out a suppressed moan and squeezed her breasts hard.*

*She could feel the milk jetting out so clearly. Jennie began to pant, looking at the mirror with blurred eyes. The picture there was unbearably lewd.*

*Her sweaty hair was sticking to her skin. Her breasts were reddened and swollen, repeatedly spurting her milk. She could not believe the woman she saw in this condition was herself.*

*And then she looked at the face of the man behind her, wild with lust and excitement. She couldn't look away from his taut, flexing muscles, and Jennie swallowed.*

*At that moment, their gazes met in the mirror. His golden eyes glittered*

*ferociously, filled with uncontrollable desire.*

*He looked as if he wanted to devour her, and a thrill of fear ran through her, but was quickly replaced by overwhelming pleasure. His obvious excitement burned through her like fire.*

*Liam's lips moved in a slow smile, and Jennie's eyes quickly lowered in embarrassment.*

*"You have to look at me," he whispered, when she refused to look up. "Come on, Jennie..."*

*She had no choice but to look into his eyes.*

*"Our baby has to come soon," he murmured. "He's made his father suffer so much."*

*He thrust up into her.*

*"And his mother, too..."*

*She could feel him shudder at the surge of pleasure, and the hand that had been squeezing her nipple followed the trail of milk over her rounded belly.*

*"You like it when I'm crude," he whispered. "But I must restrain myself a little..."*

*Liam bit down hard on the back of her neck, cupping both her breasts in his hand, and then lifted his wet fingers to his mouth and slowly licked them, looking at her.*

*"So for now, I will."*

*Tears streamed from her eyes at the intense pleasure. Saliva flowed from her mouth, but she could not close it, unable to contain her cries. Liam sucked at her lips.*

*"Ahhh... Liam!"*

*Jennie was so overwhelmed, she couldn't even speak properly. Again and again, she begged him to slow down, but Liam wouldn't stop. He*

*tormented her until she was moaning like a wild animal, all her shame forgotten.*

*"Oh, I, I love it...!"*

*Liam kissed her at those words, gently tugging her nipples with his fingers. Even though he wasn't thrusting into her hard, it still felt so good, his steady stroking was making her lose her mind.*

*She felt his manhood throbbing inside her, and Jennie tightened on him, squeezing her inner walls to spur him on. She felt his whole body stiffen behind her, and his teeth sank into the back of her neck.*

*That slight pain only goaded her pleasure. Jennie was trembling right on the edge, and her backside wiggled against him involuntarily. His strong arms encircled her, and Liam moaned in her ear.*

*"Jennie..."*

*Inside her, a sticky heat suddenly erupted, and Jennie cried out his name.*

*"Ahhh...ahhh, Liam!"*

*Her body shuddered as she climaxed.*

Remembering that moment, Jennie covered her mouth with her hand. After that encounter, she hadn't been able to bring herself to go near the mirror again for some time. Every time she looked at that mirror, she remembered that vision of herself and the look in Liam's eyes. It made her shiver.

The memory also made a tingling sensation fill her belly, and Jennie sighed. Maybe she somehow had beast's blood in her, too. It was the only explanation for why she thought so often about sex.

Wandering briefly through her rooms, Jennie slipped through the glass door that opened on the balcony, to cool off without actually going out for a walk at so late an hour.

But even this did not distract her. It only made her remember Liam's visits in the middle of the night.

The patter of pebbles thrown against the glass door, the man who entered her room as if it belonged to him. The strange intruder who had crossed all boundaries and ended up taking hold of her heart.

She couldn't stop thinking about him. His absence was unbearable, like a chill wind blowing through her heart.

Her hand pressed against her chest as Jennie walked over to the closet and took a shirt from inside. It was one of Liam's.

Jennie hugged it tightly, then burrowed into the closet, pulling out more clothes, greedy for his scent.

Piling them on the bed, she lay down among them, breathing the faint scent of tobacco, the distinctive smell of Liam's body. The scent made her lower body tighten. Jennie rubbed her face into his clothes

Liam had taught her how to masturbate, but she never did it alone. Not just because she was embarrassed, but because she did not even feel the urge without him.

As she preferred to repress the sexual desire that Liam had worked so hard to instill in her, Jennie had no choice now but to wait for him, and hope he came home as soon as possible. She closed her eyes.

"Liam..." She sighed wistfully.

And then she froze. She had the sensation of eyes upon her, watching her from somewhere. Her room was one of the most severely restricted places in the palace. Not even Mura could enter recklessly after Jennie had gone to bed.

Goosebumps prickled her skin. Quickly, Jennie sat up and looked around, and caught her breath. Golden eyes were glowing in the dark. He was watching her as if he were tasting her with his eyes.

She let out the breath she had been holding.

"Oh..." She murmured, as her heart began to speed up.

"I was wondering what my wife was doing while I was out." Liam smiled. "I would never have imagined such a welcome."

Liam could not have been more satisfied than if Jennie had been waiting for him with a birthday present. Jennie froze.

"Liam...?" She finally managed, barely able to move her stiff tongue. Her eyes blinked, unable to believe what she was seeing. "How are you...here?"

He should still be in Herben. She couldn't believe he was in the palace of Estia. She had to pinch her arm to see if she was dreaming.

But he was still there in front of her, slowly approaching, the moonlight in the window blocked by his huge body. His shadow fell over her as he bent, bringing his face close to hers.

"Were you masturbating?" He asked, low and mischievous.

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## Chapter 184

### Chapter 184 — Hold Back

Belatedly, she remembered she had pulled a pile of his clothing from the closet. Jennie let one of his shirts fall out of her hand.

Her lips parted soundlessly as he moved closer.

There were so many questions she wanted to ask him, but not a single one emerged. Instead, her eyes fell to the bulge in his trousers, visible even in the dark. She stared at it as though hypnotized.

"No, I didn't..." She said dazedly.

"Why?"

He pushed her back by her shoulders, and Jennie fell into the pile of clothes, her silver hair scattering around her. Liam leaned over her, his hands braced on either side of her head.

"Why didn't you?" He repeated, looking down into her eyes.

She didn't answer. The scent of his tobacco mingled with the cool night air, and she closed her eyes.

"It must have been hard for my wife to hold back," he whispered, his lips tickling her ear.

Jennie's cheeks flushed, and she bit her lower lip.

There was a tingling inside, between her legs, already getting wet. Her body knew what would happen next and was preparing immediately to accept her mate.

She had lost her mind.

She was being so shameless, but there was no way to suppress her response. Liam had burned the memory of sex into her body.

Her mouth went dry, and her eyes fluttered open.

She couldn't wait any longer. She had meant to ask him how he had returned so soon, but entirely different words fell from her lips.

"Just..." She whispered, her arms tightening around his neck. "Put it in me right now."

Liam's gaze heated. His lips curved as he bared his manhood, pushed her nightgown up, and thrust straight in to the root.

"Ahh..."

Her eyes widened, and a moan escaped her. Liam bent over her, burying his face against her neck. His nose tickled the delicate skin as he licked her, feeling her spasm under him. He lifted his head.

"You came as soon as I filled you?" He smiled, looking at her trembling face.

She gave him a tiny nod, and Liam gripped her waist tight in both hands, moving his waist back and forth.

"Oh, my god...!" Jennie cried out, seeing stars.

She clutched the sheets in her hands, shivering, and then realized they felt strange, and she was clutching Liam's clothes to her. He laughed at the sight.

"Why did you want to roll around in your husband's clothes?"

"Ah, I wanted to, ahh..." It was hard to speak when he was pounding into her so fast. "I wanted, to smell it..."

It sounded so lewd, but Jennie tried not to be embarrassed, and told the truth to the man she loved.

"I wanted to have sex with you, but you were gone, and so, I wanted your scent..."

She whispered the confession, her eyes flicking up at him.

"I love you, Liam..."

His brow furrowed, and his eyes grew fierce.

"You make me crazy."

Liam withdrew his manhood from her and began to roughly stroke himself with his hand, slick from their shared fluids. His eyes were riveted on Jennie and he licked his lips, his breath coming harsh.

His muscles tensed. His body stiffened as semen spurted from his penis, slicking Jennie from her belly to her breasts.

"Haa..."

His chest rose and fell rapidly before it began to slow, and the strong scent of his seed made Jennie's head spin. Liam's fingers spread it over her body, marking her skin with himself.

"Did you learn to say lewd words while I was gone?"

"I still have to learn," she whispered, reddening, but licked his fingers one by one as he lifted them to her lips. Liam bit her slender wrist.

Jennie squirmed and bit his forearm in retaliation. It was like watching a little cat bite him. Smiling, Liam stroked his manhood between her thighs.

"I have a lot built up..."

He hardened, throbbing. His voice was low and dangerous.

"I want you again."

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Jennie had a hard time coming back to her senses. It had been a long time since she and Liam had sex, and he had showed no mercy to the end. Jennie was so aroused, she gave herself completely to him.

They had both been mad for each other.

But afterward, she felt embarrassed.

Staring at the ceiling, she lay stunned, with no strength left in her

body as he wiped her gently with a wet towel. Even after he had washed her clean, she could still smell his scent, permeating her body. Her cheeks flushed.

After he tossed the towel aside, Liam bent to kiss the long scars on her thighs. Those wounds had been so bad, it had been a long while before she could walk again. Liam still kissed her scars as if it were a sacrament.

His lips moved over the long white line on her thigh, and then he buried his face in her belly and let out a long sigh. His breath tickled her skin.

Jennie swept a hand through his hair, and asked what she had been wondering from the moment she saw him.

"How on earth did you get into the room?"

"You left the door open."

She had opened the glass door to the balcony to cool off.

"Why did you leave the door open?" He asked severely. "What if someone bad got in?"

"Who would get in with security so tight?"

"Someone like me."

Jennie knew she would only lose if this conversation continued.

"I will keep the door locked," she promised. "But you came back alone, didn't you?"

His arms tightened around her.

"Yes."

"Was it difficult?"

"It was a bit complicated. I haven't had a good sleep in days."

He had changed horses several times along the way, riding all the

way from Herben to Estia without stopping. Except to deal with a few assassins along the way.

"I told you to be careful..." Jennie protested.

Liam only smiled. He knew that he was in the wrong, and his face actually showed his weariness. If anyone else had attempted it, they would have collapsed halfway, foaming blood at the mouth.

"You should have come back safely," she admonished. "Slower."

"I didn't want to," he said, like a disobedient child. He lifted his head slightly, turning it with his cheek resting lightly on her belly. "I missed you, Jennie."

They were simple words, but they still moved her more than anything else. She had felt the same way.

"Me, too," she admitted shyly. "I've missed you so much."

"I was also in a hurry because a thief is coming to my house," he grumbled, kissing her stomach.

"Thief?"

He laughed at her surprise.

"We'll talk about it tomorrow." He stretched out beside her and then hugged her again, as if he couldn't be parted from her for a moment. "I was planning to give you roses when I came home. I'll have to do that tomorrow, too. I was in a hurry, coming back. And I thought you would rather see me than the roses."

Jennie hugged him, burying her face in his broad chest to sleep. Liam let his eyes close a moment later, a smile lingering on his face. Soon, the slow, even sound of their breathing filled the quiet room.

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## Chapter 185

### Chapter 185 — Good Morning

When Jennie woke up, she was still in his warm arms, feeling as if she were wrapped up by vines.

Looking at him, she smiled.

Usually, he was the first to wake. And even on the rare occasions when she woke up before him, Liam almost immediately stirred. She hardly ever got to see him sleeping.

But he gave no sign of rousing now, and as she watched him, she realized that he really was very, very tired.

It made a bitter feeling wash through her, and she reached out a careful hand to caress his cheek.

Suddenly, she remembered how he had always used to look.

Before, she had found his expression somewhat frightening. And maybe it hadn't changed that much, except for his affection when he looked at Jennie.

But now, with his eyes shut and sleeping so peacefully, she couldn't help thinking that he looked...adorable.

No one would have ever believed it. He was such a fearsome man. But Jennie was sure that anyone who saw him at this moment would have had to agree.

Liam was so cute.

And the thought of anyone else looking at him like this made her very jealous.

But he only ever slept like this before her.

Unprotected. The only person he shared his soul with was his wife.

Unable to resist, she gently kissed her sleeping husband, and his closed eyelids flickered and fluttered open. There was already a smile in his eyes.

"Jennie..."

He kissed the top of her head.

"You want more already?"

His hands moved to pull her lower body against his, and she could feel how stiff his manhood was, erect on first waking. More than once they had awakened and had frantic sex first thing in the morning, but he had already pushed her to the limit the night before.

And she wanted him to sleep some more.

"Go back to sleep," she whispered.

"If you promise to stay with me."

"I will always be by your side."

The promise was enough to make him close his eyes, and still wrapped in his arms, Jennie was soon asleep again beside him.

"Mama..."

The whisper came some time later to wake Jennie.

"Mama!" A light weight pounced on her. "Mama, wake up."

Jennie stirred as she felt several tickling kisses on her forehead, and then a sudden bite on her cheek. A deep voice spoke.

"Leo."

The light weight beside her disappeared, and Jennie finally swam to full consciousness. Liam had lifted his offspring with one hand, and was pinching his son's cheek.

"No biting your mother."

"Father bites her all the time!"

"That's something only fathers can do," Liam replied, and Jennie smiled as she watched the two arguing, Leo's face a scowling, miniature copy of his father's.

"I took care of Mama while Father was gone," the boy boasted as Liam lifted him over his shoulder.

"And I hunted!"

"What did you hunt?"

"Bufflies! But I didn't hurt it."

He told his father all about how he had stalked his prey and then decided to let it go, and Liam smiled.

"Good boy," he said. "You will take the name Kan."

Leo beamed proudly at his father's praise, and both pairs of golden eyes turned to Jennie at the same time.

"Mama!" Leo cried at once. "It's morning!"

Liam lowered their son onto the bed and Leo rushed over to fling himself into Jennie's arms, as if he had been waiting forever for a hug. Jennie kissed his forehead, smiling up at Liam

"Good morning," she told him.

With the three of them together, it must be.

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Mura did not seem surprised by Liam's sudden appearance. She had likely expected him to appear ahead of his army.



"Would you like to have breakfast with your family?" She asked, as she approached Jennie with a basin of water to wash her face. "They're both waiting for you."

Of course she wanted to have breakfast together.

After washing up, she hurriedly dressed and headed to the dining room. There was already food on the table, but it was untouched. It looked as if Leo and Liam had been waiting for her.

As soon as she sat down, Jennie began to eat. In Estia, meals were served one course at a time, in a specific order. But whenever she ate with Leo and Liam, they dined in the Kurkan style, which she much preferred. Having so much food on the table made her feel as if she could eat as much as she wanted.

Jennie understood why. In the past, she had always been kept on a strict diet, and she had lived that way so long, she still ate much less than a normal person.

She enjoyed being able to eat freely, after so many years of suppressing her hunger. And she found it satisfying to watch her husband and son eating so eagerly. Seeing Leo tear into a turkey leg whetted her own appetite.

With Liam back, Jennie herself was eating heartily for the first time in a long time, and Mura smiled as she served more food, watching Jennie's plate empty.

"The King of Cha is targeting you," Liam told her, neatly removing the bones from her meat with a knife.

"Wh...what?" Jennie blinked repeatedly, startled.

He could only be planning to kill her since he had no chance of killing Liam.

There had actually been quite a few assassination attempts, as the union of Kurkan and Estia posed a significant threat to the kingdoms of the rest of the continent. But there had been no attempts on Jennie's life lately, because of Liam's policies with assassins.

All of them were punished severely, and tortured for information to find out who had bought them, but those who targeted Jennie received special treatment.

On one occasion, Liam had been so outraged, he and his entire army had diverted to visit the kingdom who had sent the assassins. The royal family was responsible for the crime, so he had them publicly beheaded in front of their own palace.

That was severe enough that there had been no further attempts to assassinate Jennie.

Of course, Jennie herself had never once laid eyes on the assassins. The Kurkans detected and dealt with them long before they reached her.

It made it hard to believe the King of Cha would try to have her killed, when all the other kingdoms of the continent had learned their lesson.

"Why would he do such a foolish thing?" she murmured thoughtfully. "He should know what happened to all the rest of them."

She fell silent at the sight of Liam's smile.

"It doesn't look like that," he said. Jennie cocked her head.

"So?"

"He's interested in you."

Suddenly, Jennie remembered the rumors she had heard of the King and Queen of Cha.

"...Ah."

Only then did Jennie realize what Liam meant, and Leo lifted his head, his cheeks puffed with food like a chipmunk's. He swallowed.

"Bad people want to hurt Mama?" He asked. He still couldn't fully understand their conversations, but he was good at sensing their emotions. Liam smiled at him.

"Yes."

"No! Can't hurt Mama, I'll hunt them!"

He looked adorable when he said that, with his hands on his hips, but an eerie gleam suddenly glowed in his golden eyes.

He looked just like his father.

Jennie glanced at Liam, who was looking proudly at his son.

In any case, it wouldn't be necessary. She would only interact with the King of Cha in public during the banquet, where the Kurkans would defend her like an iron wall. Liam had no reason to worry.

But that conviction soon faded.

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## Chapter 186

### Chapter 186 — Hunting

The banquet to celebrate the victory over Herben would have to wait until the rest of the Kurkan army arrived. It was meant to be a magnificent, triumphal event, but they could hardly hold it now just because Liam had appeared, alone, so much sooner than expected.

The emissaries from Cha sent word that they would arrive soon, and it left Jennie a little free time to spend with her family. Every morning, Liam came to Jennie with a bouquet of flowers, which he had personally picked and then trimmed. He always made sure to cut away every thorn.

He liked to make things for her with his own hands.

Every time she received flowers from him, his devotion made her smile. And then he would say something to embarrass her.

"You are more beautiful than all of these," he said, utterly serious, looking at her as if she were the most beautiful thing in the world. Every time he did this, it made her blush.

Jennie suspected he was giving her flowers just for that.

And when he wasn't playing with his wife, Liam spent a lot of time playing with Leo.

The boy was having a lot of fun. Jennie was always quiet, but Liam played with his son with surprising roughness. Watching the two of them play was enough to give Jennie heart palpitations.

They started off rough and then escalated to dangerous, and their most recent game impossible to watch. The game involved a bow and arrows.

Leo was running in the distance as Liam fired arrows at him, and the little boy had to avoid the arrows until he reached the place where Liam had planted a flag.

The tips of the arrows were blunted with cloth wrappings, and Leo raced over the ground, dodging them all until finally one of the arrows struck him.

The little boy was knocked off his feet.

"Leo!"

Jennie, who had been watching from the shade of a tree, started up with a cry. But Leo quickly scrambled back to his feet, and Jennie felt relief flood her as he started running again.

It seemed as if this was natural for a Kurkan. Jennie could not understand their world. To her, this looked more like combat training than a game, but she decided not to intervene. Leo was enjoying it so much.

A few days later, Liam decided to take his son hunting. With a new small dagger at his hip, Leo was filled with determination.

"Mama! I'll catch a big prey for you!"

He held out his arms to indicate the massive animal he would catch, and Jennie stroked his cheek.

"It's okay if you don't. Just be careful."

Leo pouted at her words. His intention to catch the largest and most ferocious trophy for his mother was clear in his face, to prove his prowess as a hunter.

But nonetheless, Jennie repeated the admonition to Liam.

"You take care of yourself, too. Don't get hurt."

As soon as she said it, she realized it was meaningless. Liam smiled.

"It's been a long time since someone said anything like that to me."

Animals feared Kurkans, instinctively sensing that they were facing a top predator. Even animals like wolves were quick to get out of their path.

"I always worry about you," Jennie told him, and Liam hugged her.

"Should we go together? I will hunt only rabbits, if you come."

When she didn't answer, he lifted her up in his arms.

"Liam! Put me down."

"I don't think I can," he said. He knew she couldn't go with them because she had work to do that day, but he was pretending he had never heard of it. "I'm thinking of kidnapping you."

He kissed his struggling wife, catching her hands as she tried to push him away. Jennie softened and smiled, stroking his cheek.

"After I finish my work today...I'll do whatever you want."

Liam sighed, laying his forehead against Jennie's.

"You can't say those things so carelessly."

"I only say it to you."

He smiled in satisfaction and set Jennie back down on the floor.

"I'll be back soon," he said. "I hope my wife will be, too."

She told him goodbye with a smile.

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## Chapter 187

### Chapter 187 — Bookstore

Jennie exited the palace with Mura at her side. Both women wore long hooded robes to hide their faces, and Jennie had even drunk a potion prepared by Morga, to temporarily change the color of her eyes and hair.

It had been a long time since she had concealed her identity like this. Walking through the crowded shopping streets, Jennie looked around her, watching carefully.

Estia had completely eradicated slavery, but unfortunately that had just created new problems.

Merchants who had lost this source of income had turned to other ways to earn money.

The most worrisome problem lately was the counterfeiting of coins.

The counterfeit coins were made by melting down silver coins minted by Jennie's government, then recasting them with additional substances. The counterfeit coins weighed the same as genuine silver coins, so they could not be detected even with scales.

The only discernible difference was a slight lack of detail in the patterns on the counterfeit coin. It took an experienced eye to detect it.

Right now, they were investigating to see how prevalent the counterfeit coins had become. And as Jennie had never been one to leave everything in the hands of her subordinates, Jennie was investigating on her own.

She bought a few items from various stores, receiving coins in change. Fortunately, all the silver coins she received were genuine.

"It's hard..." Mura shook her head, following closely behind Jennie were their purchases in her hands.

She could not distinguish the counterfeit coins from the real ones. "Even the genuine coins will wear down over time. How can you tell them apart?"

"The patterns are a little different. Especially here..."

Jennie explained it in detail to the curious Mura, but the Kurkan woman still couldn't see the subtle differences.

"Let's go to that bookstore," she suggested with a smile. "Then we'll stop for some tea and something to eat."

"Good idea."

Mura was always glad when Jennie volunteered to get something to eat, and headed for the bookstore enthusiastically. As soon as they arrived, Jennie asked her to wait outside.

The bookshop had everything from ancient books to brand new releases, a fascinating collection from an owner that clearly loved stories. Jennie could have asked for an assortment of books to be sent to the palace, but there was nothing like the satisfaction of choosing the books herself in person. She enjoyed walking down the aisles, skimming all the titles.

Jennie smiled as soon as she entered the bookshop.

The smell of books made her feel at ease, though she immediately noticed no one else was there. It looked as if the owner had stepped out for a moment.

But she thought he would be back soon; there was no sign out front saying it was closed. Jennie decided to look at books while she waited, and Mura had a cigar to smoke, so she could take her time.

As she wandered, browsing new books that had just come in from foreign lands, she heard footsteps inside the store.

".....!"

A white-skinned man with glasses sat down in the empty chair behind the cash register.



"Are you looking for any book in particular?" He asked with a slight smile.

The owner of the bookstore was an old man with a hunched back who walked with a cane.

"Are you managing the store for a while?" She asked, examining this man carefully.

His eyes glinted at her question.

"Why do you say that? The owner might have changed."

He looked as if he found her question amusing. Jennie decided to play along. He probably wouldn't give her a straight answer otherwise.

"Your glasses are expensive, a commoner couldn't afford them. You have straight hair, clean hands, and...you even smell like perfume." His eyes behind their glasses didn't even blink as she said this, and Jennie continued without looking away. "Maybe you are a nobleman, working in this place on a whim for a little while."

This man seemed foreign, by the way he spoke, but Jennie decided to keep that observation to herself.

The man burst out laughing.

"That's true," he said. "You don't seem like an ordinary person, either."

Jennie just smiled. Since it looked as if the bookshop owner wouldn't be returning anytime soon, she just told the man the name of the book she had been searching for.

"Do you have the eighth volume of Classic Numismatics?"

"If you can read that book, you must have mastered the ancient languages," he replied, surprised.

"...I know a little."

The Estian royal family was obliged to learn many ancient languages, so they would be able to read ancient texts. But Jennie was the only one who had troubled to learn them properly. They were quite difficult, even for scholars.

And now she was the sole surviving member of the royal family.

"You are amazing," the man said, shaking Jennie out of her thoughts, his face lighting up. "Have you read *Monarchy, State, and Politics?* And *Honest Interpretation?*"

His voice was quick and excited.

"I've read both."

He seemed likely to prolong the conversation if she didn't do something.

"Were you going to get that book?" Jennie reminded him, before he could say anything else.

"I beg your pardon, I got a little excited," he said, smiling awkwardly. He rose from the counter and slipped past Jennie. "Please give me a moment..."

The man mumbled to himself as he fumbled along the bookshelf behind her. Jennie looked at the books that were on the counter by the register. They were mostly light novels that might catch the eye of customers. One title caught her attention.

### ***Eat Me...?***

That was an odd title. Jennie skimmed part of the first page. It looked as if the female protagonist had borrowed money from the male protagonist, who was quite scary, despite his beauty. Then the problems began. It looked like a morality fable, teaching the importance of care with money.

But she soon lost interest; it seemed to her that many characters were mentally unwell. Even she couldn't consider the male protagonist normal.

Shaking her head, she set the book down.

There was a sound behind her, and Jennie turned, startled. A hand grabbed her, pulling, and she squeezed her eyes shut as she slipped off balance, expecting to fall to the floor.

But instead of the shock of impact, something was holding her firmly.

Softly, Jennie opened her eyes, meeting the man's gaze. Her hood had fallen back as she slipped, and he was looking down at her, his lips slightly parted.

Jennie averted her gaze.

He had lost his balance on the ladder, reaching for a book on a high shelf, and then grabbed her robe to keep from falling. Fortunately he had recovered quickly enough to catch them both.

But Jennie was embarrassed by the position she was in, held so tightly in his arms that she thought he might have left marks from his hands.

"Let go of me," she said seriously.

Even if it had been a mistake, she couldn't hide the coldness in her voice. The man released his grip slowly.

"...I'm sorry," he said, a halting and belated apology.

"How much is it?" Jennie asked, taking the book from his hand and pulling her hood back into place.

The man stammered out the price, and Jennie set the money on the counter and then left before he could say anything else.

"Jennie!"

Mura smiled as Jennie approached, walking slowly.

She was too tired to go to the coffee shop. She just wanted to go back to the palace. Suddenly, she stopped, glancing at the title of the book

in her hand.

"Haa..."

She sighed aloud, momentarily forgetting her manners.

The man had charged her the wrong price for the book. Jennie had paid far less than she should have.

As a matter of fact, the bookshop was going to go bankrupt if he managed it this way.

She couldn't imagine why the store was in the hands of this person. Checking the price of the book again, Jennie pulled out two coins.

"Mura, wait a minute," she said. "The clerk made a mistake with the price..."

Leaving the book with Mura, she went back to the bookstore to find the register unoccupied. She was about to call out when she noticed the door at the back of the bookstore was propped up, leading to a side alley.

When she slipped out the door, she found the man smoking a cigar in the alley, gazing blankly at the sky. The sight reminded her so much of Liam, she stopped and unknowingly watched him for a minute as he smoked.

But a frown came to her face as she looked at his white hands, traced with veins. The smell of the cigar was also totally different from the ones Liam liked.

The acrid smell made her nose itch.

Jennie held her breath and quickly approached, holding out the two silver coins.

"You charged me the wrong price for the book."

He did not look surprised at her sudden appearance.

"Oh, thank you very much," he said mildly, taking the coins with

nonchalance.

It made Jennie suspicious. Had he deliberately made a mistake? Maybe he had done it with the intention of getting her to return to the shop, though she couldn't imagine what his motive might be.

The man pitched his cigar to the ground and crushed it with his foot. He seemed like he wanted to talk, but Jennie had no reason to continue a conversation, and turned away.

"I'll be going."

"Oh, wait," he said, catching her sleeve. "Would you like to have tea? There's a good coffee shop nearby."

He offered the suggestion with a smile.

"I'm sorry, my husband is waiting for me," Jennie said. "I also have a son. You shouldn't pursue a married woman."

"You're so strict," he noted with a slight smile. "I just wanted to talk to you."

His smile was so innocent, Jennie was taken aback, embarrassed at her presumption.

"It's not often that I meet someone who can speak the ancient languages," he went on. "And besides, we share an interest in similar books."

Unconsciously, Jennie nodded. It was true. But the man took a step closer, positioning himself near enough to make her uncomfortable.

"So, when will you come back again?" He asked.

If he had moved one step closer, she would have recoiled.

"I don't know."

"I'd like to make sure I'm here, so I can talk to you."

His voice was filled with nothing but good intentions. He seemed like

a gentle man, easy to picture sitting at a desk with a book in his hands.

She could tell at a glance that he was sturdy, despite his baggy clothes. She had felt the strength of his hands when he had caught her and held her. He probably was a person of exceptional intelligence.

Jennie glimpsed the man's eyes through his spectacles, the smile that carried into them and made him look harmless. But the longer she looked at them, the more wary she felt.

"Maybe in fifteen days," she said, picking a number at random, since she would not be able to return to the store for a while. "I imagine we'll see each other, if we get the chance."

She didn't need to tell him the truth; the odds were they would never see each other again. This was just the fastest way to get out of the conversation. She left the alley without a backward glance, leaving the man behind.

He chuckled, watching her go.

"...Hmm." He muttered. "I like her."

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## Chapter 188

### Chapter 188 — Kingdom Cha

King Eunwoo of Cha was a man with a brilliant mind. He was as eager for knowledge as he was for sex.

He had been greatly anticipating this trip to Estia because he believed he could satisfy both urges there, not only exotic knowledge, but new women.

There was nothing better.

He set out for Estia in secret, so he would not have to see the Queen of Cha for a few days.

As soon as he arrived, he spent his evenings in the Estia's red light district, and was out wandering through bookstores when the sun came up. During the day, he spent his time reading books and gathering information about the royal family.

When he found a bookstore he liked, he rented the whole place for the duration of his stay.

That was where he was, quietly reading a book when he heard the shop door open. Thinking the shop owner had returned, he went back to the front, only to find a woman.

He had forgotten to put a Closed sign on the door of the shop to keep people away for a few days. But the sound of her voice aroused him, so Herod decided to accept her as a guest. Besides, she wasn't just a fellow reader, she also spoke ancient languages.

He wanted a look at her face.

Really, he had no expectations; he was just curious about who the owner of that voice was. So he pretended to fall, and grabbed for her hood, finally revealing her face. It was the icing on the cake.

He had never seen such a beauty. But what struck him even more than her perfect face was how those fine features looked when she

was embarrassed. He could not forget that trembling of her eyes, or the way she swiftly controlled it. That sudden coldness shook his heart.

She was definitely the kind of woman Eunwoo liked.

It was a little disappointing that her eyes and hair were an ordinary brown; he thought she would look better with more striking coloration. He would want her to dye her hair, in future.

Estia had many beautiful women, and he could only hope its Queen would match the beauty he had seen in the bookshop. He was curious to see why so many powerful men had risked their lives to have her.

But even if the Queen was beautiful, he couldn't imagine that she would have the same charm of the woman he had met. Without even realizing it, his curiosity about the Queen had become secondary.

He wanted to know more about the woman in the bookshop. She had tried to draw a line by saying she was married, but for him, that was even more ideal. Estia valued the purity of brides so highly, only a married woman would dare to have an affair.

He didn't understand how she could have maintained such a beautiful appearance after having a child. But the more he imagined the sound of her panting with pleasure, the sooner he wanted to be in bed with her.

It was obvious that she had lied as she was leaving, but it wouldn't be difficult to find a noblewoman like that, in the small social circle of aristocrats.

He just had to wait a little longer and he would have her. Herod was at ease. He always got what he wanted.

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## Chapter 189

### Chapter 189 — Smell

Jennie wondered what the man she had met in the bookstore was doing right now.

She was curious about him. He looked like a nobleman or merchant from another kingdom, and she had wondered if he might not be involved in the counterfeit coin problem. He didn't look like an ordinary man.

It shouldn't be too difficult to find out information about him, if he was a frequent visitor to the bookshop.

Mura had stayed by Jennie's side once they returned to the palace.

"I will prepare your bath," she said.

"A little later," Jennie replied. "I have some urgent matters to handle first."

Mura followed Jennie into her office, bending to surreptitiously sniff the Queen. Nodding to herself, she glanced out the windows to check the angle of the sun.

Lost in thought, Jennie didn't notice any of this as she sat down at her desk in the office and pulled out the silver coins she had collected that day to examine them. As she had thought, all of them were genuine.

It seemed the counterfeits had not yet been spread widely, which agreed with the reports of her investigator. Next time, it was not the shops in the busier areas of the city that would need to be checked. They would have to look in more discreet quarters.

The sparkle faded from Jennie's eyes. It had been difficult to successfully eradicate the slave trade, and now counterfeit coins were being manufactured.

The counterfeiters would regret their crime when she caught them.

She would have them executed in the public square. A severe punishment that would serve as an example, so no one would ever even think of trying it again.

Pulling out a fresh sheet of paper, Jennie wrote a letter to Count Valtein, offering her observations about the counterfeit coins, and also asking him to investigate the man she had met in the bookstore.

Sealing the letter with wax, she set the letter aside.

She was considering going to have her bath when the office door suddenly burst open.

"Mama!"

There was only one person who would make such a racket moving through Estia's palace.

"Leo!"

Though he had often been reminded of his etiquette, the boy often forgot when he was excited. But Jennie decided to save her scolding for later.

"You're back early," she said.

"I ran 'cause I missed mama," he said, hurrying over to her chair before she could rise. In one hand, he extended his trophy for her appreciation. "Look, look, mama!"

The bird he had hunted was nearly as large as his own body. It might have even been bigger if its wings had been extended.

"See, I did it like this!"

Leo stalked across the bedroom, demonstrating how he had come across the bird on the ground, then snapped its neck. The little boy's eyes glittered with feral pleasure. The bigger he got, the more evident it was that he had Kurkan blood in his veins.

The boy could not be judged by normal human standards. Jennie bent to congratulate the little Kurkan on his first successful hunt.

"Well done," she said. "You are a true Kurkan."

When his mother stroked his head, Leo's eyes grew large, and he shoved the dead bird onto her desk with both hands.

"Mama! For Mama's pre, pre, present!" He exclaimed. He was so excited, it took him a few tries to get the words out.

"Thank you, Leo," Jennie replied, as Mura nudged the little boy. Even though the animal wasn't actively bleeding, it wasn't good manners to put dead animals on the Queen's desk.

"Leo, that's not nice," she began, but Leo looked up at her and puffed out his cheeks. He liked it when Morga squeezed his cheeks like that, it made a funny noise come out of his mouth.

"Why don't we have it for dinner tonight?" Jennie intervened quickly. "We can eat the animal you hunted, Leo."

"I will cook it well," Mura agreed. "I'll also tell everyone about his kill, so everyone in the palace will know he is a brave hunter."

"Yes," Leo agreed at once, handing the bird to Mura.

She took the bird in one hand and Leo's hand in the other.

"You need a bath, my prince," Mura said. Leo was smeared all over with dirt. As the two left the room, Jennie was surprised to see Liam's leaning against the door frame.

"Liam. When did you get here?"

Liam gave a slightly crooked smile as Mura quickly slipped past him with Leo, shutting the door.

It left Jennie and Liam alone in her office. Normally, he would have come over at once to kiss her and tell her all about his day. But now he just stared at her, silent.

"Why aren't you saying anything?" Jennie asked, rising cautiously.

"Sit down."

Jennie sat back down in her chair instantly, and Liam strode toward her, placing his large hands on the desk on either side of her. His shadow fell over her as he leaned forward, looming, and Jennie had to tilt her head back to look up at him.

His head bent, nuzzling his face in her neck. The tip of his nose brushed against her skin, and her shoulders twitched. Liam inhaled thoughtfully, and a strange nervousness swept over Jennie. She stiffened.

Suddenly, she felt like a cornered prey animal. Liam's voice was deep when he spoke.

"You smell like tobacco," he said, lifting half-lidded eyes to look at her. His eyes were filled with a bright golden glow, and he smiled, showing his teeth. "It's not mine."

Jennie's mind went blank. Liam's mood was so unusual, for a moment the insane thought popped into her mind...

...did I cheat on him and then forget it?

But no, that was ridiculous. Jennie tried to gather her thoughts. She had met that man at the bookstore earlier, and the smell of his tobacco might have lingered on her clothes, after their conversation.

And it had not only been a long time since her visit to the bookstore, but she hadn't even been around that man for very long while he was smoking.

Surreptitiously, Jennie sniffed. She couldn't smell anything. It took a beast's senses to notice something so subtle.

Either way, it was a simple explanation. She looked up at Liam. That smile was still curving his lips, and it made goosebumps rise on her skin.

Liam didn't doubt Jennie's fidelity. They were mates who had bonded their souls together. As they were each part of each other, their bond was eternal.

But even with that, Liam did not allow just anyone to get close to

her. Those who didn't know Liam did not think he was a jealous man because he always outwardly appeared unworried. Those who knew him well knew that he was very jealous indeed.

People who approached Jennie with good intentions were treated well. But he was not so sanguine with those that approached her with sexual intent. With the instincts of an animal, Liam sensed it when someone was interested in his mate. In this case, without knowing anything about the circumstances, he sensed it just from the scent of foreign tobacco smoke on her clothing. It was almost more like sorcery than instinct.

As she wondered what to do, Jennie decided a kiss wouldn't hurt, and caught his cheeks, brushing her lips against his. Liam accepted the kiss without hesitation.

His tongue immediately pressed into her mouth through her parted lips, and after a brief but passionate kiss, they broke apart.

"I seem to have caught some of the smell of the cigar the bookstore owner was smoking," she said.

"So?"

"So I need you to cover it up with your scent."

Liam smiled at the awkward attempt at seduction.

Lifting her in his arms, he carried her over to the nearby sofa. His hands went to the buttons on her gown, slowly exposing her skin, and then stopped.

He was staring at something. Jennie felt a jolt as she realized what he had seen.

She had hand marks on both her arms.

That was when she remembered something else that she had completely forgotten. The man from the bookstore had held her very tightly when she fell.

This time, there was nothing she could say. If she had a hundred

mouths, she couldn't have said a word.

Liam's eyes narrowed, but he didn't shout. Instead, he whispered.

"Looks like Mura doesn't want to keep her job."

Jennie felt fear.

"It wasn't her fault," she said quickly. "I asked her not to stick too close to me."

Quickly, she explained everything that had happened in detail, telling him how the man in the bookstore had caught her when she had accidentally fallen.

Gradually, the glow faded from Liam's eyes as they returned to normal.

Inside, Jennie sighed with relief. She honestly didn't know what Liam would do to the man from the store, but she had to save poor Mura.

At that instant, the gown she was wearing was ripped off her, the sound of tearing fabric echoing through the office. Liam's large hands rested on her thighs, tracing the faint white lines of her scars.

"Jennie."

He bent his head to her legs, kissing the scar first, and then biting it with a brief flash of pain. He left his teeth marks etched over the scar.

"Don't let anyone else mark your body," he whispered again, lightly brushing the marks of hands on her arms. "I am the only one who can mark you."

Jennie nodded slowly, and he smiled. He knew she was sorry for what had happened.

"Then let's treat them, first."

Rummaging through the drawers of his office, Liam searched for ointment. Jennie had fragile skin. He wanted to treat it properly.

She sat on his thighs in her nightgown as he gently applied the ointment to the bruises on her arms, then kissed her cheek.

"I always go too far when it comes to you," he said.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to worry you..."

Jennie bit her lip, and his long finger reached to brush her lips apart, smoothing away the bite.

"You don't need to apologize," he said, and toppled her onto the couch, spreading her legs apart. His voice was mischievous. "I plan to do a lot of things I will have to apologize for."

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## Chapter 190

### Chapter 190 — Chance

Seated on the windowsill, Liam held his long pipe in his fingers. The Kurkans stood nearby, their faces tense as he smoked.

After a painful silence, the door opened, and Mura cautiously entered.

Slowly, Mura approached until she stood in front of him, and Liam waved a hand silently. The Kurkans left the room at once, leaving Mura behind.

Immediately, she dropped to her knees, her head bowed as she awaited his judgment.

"Jennie had marks on her arms."

Mura's face went pale.

The air in the room weighed down on her shoulders as if it had taken tangible shape, and Mura's lips moved slowly, the words working past the tightness in her throat.

"Liam..."

A shiver ran through her as if she had taken a chill, and tears welled in her eyes. Liam lifted his pipe to his lips, looking coolly at the shaken Mura.

It was becoming hard to breathe under that stare.

Liam finally allowed a sigh to escape, and Mura struck her head against the floor, cracking the marble. Her blood stained it.

"I'm sorry. Jennie didn't do anything wrong. It's all my fault, it's my lack as her lady-in-waiting..."

Blood streamed into the tears flowing down her face, but Mura felt no pain despite the wound.



"Please, give me a chance to redeem myself," she pleaded.

The corners of Liam's mouth slowly lifted.

"Jennie appreciates you very much."

Mura held her breath, waiting for his next words.

"I hope you won't disappoint me again, Mura."

".....!"

Mura's eyes widened as she realized that Liam would give her another chance.

"I'll tell you what I've discovered," she said quickly.

She had not missed the scent of tobacco on Jennie. As they were walking back to the palace from the bookstore, she had smelled it, and she knew that the owner of the bookstore did not smoke.

She hadn't thought it was a big deal, but nonetheless, once they had returned to the palace, she sent a few Kurkans to investigate the bookstore.

But she'd had no idea that Jennie had come back with bruises from a man's hands on her arms.

Mura did not try to offer excuses or justifications. No matter what she said, it wouldn't change the fact that someone had put marks on the Queen of Kurkan.

"A foreigner has recently appeared in the city," she said. "In the evenings, he is usually in the red light district, and during the day he hangs about the bookstore. He has become famous in the red light district. There are rumors that he has a new woman every night. And he rented out the bookstore to read quietly by himself."

It was an unusual combination. Mura ended her explanation with a more dangerous hypothesis.

"I can't be sure, but...it's possible that he's the King of Cha."

Liam's lips twisted. Everyone had been so focused on the conquest of Herben, they had overlooked the movements of the King of Cha.

Who would have imagined that a King would sneak into Estia by himself? What strange, reckless behavior.

"The peace agreement is going to be interesting," Liam murmured, with a faint smile.

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## Chapter 191

### Chapter 191 — True Identity

Jennie was surprised to see Mura appear with a bandage on her forehead, having somehow been injured in the night.

"Mura!" She exclaimed. Jennie could not believe this had been an accident, given Mura's agility. It could only have been a punishment from Liam.

But how could he have punished her like this, after Jennie had defended her so insistently the night before? But just as she was contemplating Liam's betrayal, Mura clarified the circumstances.

"I did this to myself," she said, defending Liam. "I did not take proper care of you. And don't worry, I'll be better soon," she added, more softly.

"But..."

"This is directly related to my honor," Mura said stubbornly.

Jennie could guess what she meant. The bruises on her arms could not be considered solely Mura's responsibility. Liam probably hadn't even considered her guilty.

It was because Jennie had taken responsibility for the marks. If she hadn't spoken, Mura would surely have lost her position as her head lady-in-waiting.

"I don't want to lose my position. Absolutely not," Mura said. "And that man from the bookstore will pay for the damages he inflicted."

A few days later, the Kurkan army finally returned to Estia, having conquered the Herben Kingdom.

Nothing else of note had happened, other than Mura striking Haban because he had made fun of her bandaged forehead.

Finally, the emissaries from Cha arrived at the royal palace of Estia.

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They arrived to find a silent palace.

Jennie did not come out to greet them herself.

Instead she sent Count Valtein, to prevent any situations that might cause misunderstandings.

They were only trying to save their own lives by offering Kurkan slaves in exchange for peace. Jennie did not need to establish personal relationships with them. It would all be over after the banquet to be held that night.

Once she had ensured that the King and Queen of Cha were escorted to a secondary palace, Jennie returned to her other business.

She was strangely busy that day. Liam had left the palace that morning, promising that he would return before the banquet, as if he had pressing matters of his own.

It seemed to Jennie that there was something strange about him. He had only just come back from the last military campaign, but he had taken Haban, Genin, Morga, and even Mura with him. From the looks of it, he had taken all of the Kurkans from the palace.

What the hell is he doing...?

But she knew Liam would never do anything that would hurt her. Jennie pushed the thoughts away.

He would tell her what he was up to when the time was right.

In the meantime, Baroness Cinael took Mura's place.

"It reminds me of the old days, Your Highness," the baroness said shyly as she handed Jennie a cup of hot black tea. Jennie accepted it with a slight smile.

Most of Jennie's former ladies-in-waiting had taken a temporary leave of absence, overwhelmed with guilt for having followed Cerdina's orders.

It didn't matter if it had been a spell that brainwashed; the things they had done could not be undone. Jennie had sent the grieving ladies away to recuperate. They would be allowed to return when they felt better.

Countess Melissa, her former head lady-in-waiting, had been in the countryside for the last few years.

Other ladies were engaged in other work to take their minds off what had happened to them. Those vacant positions were currently filled by Mura and other Kurkan women.

Some of Jennie's ladies had become close to the Kurkans. According to Mura, it was because they shared a common cause.

Jennie assumed it had something to do with food.

But because of everyone doing their best to support her, she was able to concentrate on her work. She was very grateful.

She was talking with Baroness Cinael while looking over some documents when another of her ladies rushed in.

"Your Highness, the King of Cha is here."

Jennie's hand froze, hovering above a paper mid-signature.

"He has been told to wait in the audience room," the lady went on. "What should I do?"

Today, Estia had received the emissaries from Cha in a perfunctory manner. That less than cordial reception must have hurt Cha's price. But it was still surprising that the king had come to visit her before the banquet. It made Jennie feel anxious.

For a moment, she stood thinking, gripping one of the quills Liam had sharpened for her. Perhaps the king had come with an interesting proposal.

Something he could not say publicly.

*The King of Cha is targeting you...*

Liam's warning flashed through her mind, and she set her quill down. She could use this opportunity to find out if the King of Cha had really come to Estia for such a purpose. She could agree to see him, and send him away immediately if he said something foolish.

The man rose courteously from his couch as she entered the audience room, and both of them froze.

".....!!"

The man was as surprised as she was, agitation reflected in both their faces. But after a moment, both of them smoothed the emotion away without taking their eyes from each other.

"Let the light shine on Estia," the man said, his voice slightly strained. "I am Eunwoo of Cha."

The man she had met in the bookshop was the King of Cha. It was such an unbelievable circumstance that it was almost impossible to think it a coincidence. Perhaps he had planned it.

Jennie's expression stiffened as she remembered again what Liam had told her.

"Why did you request an audience, King of Cha?" She asked, speaking formally to make it clear she did not want to acknowledge any personal relationship. "Is there a problem?"

The question only left him room to offer a specific complaint, or leave. Eunwoo understood her intentions, but had no intention of complying. He let out a short laugh.

"I never thought I'd run into you like this again," he said cheerfully, giving her an admiring glance that took in every detail of her appearance. "Your hair and eyes...they suit you so much better this way."

Jennie's eyes narrowed. It irked her that he was pretending it had

been a chance encounter. And he was pretending not to notice her clear desire to ignore it.

"I have just remembered an urgent matter, so I must take my leave," she said. "The palace gardens are quite beautiful. You may enjoy a stroll there, if you are idle."

She departed the audience chamber before he could respond further, and Baroness Cinael, who had been waiting for Jennie outside the chamber, quickly moved to follow her. A voice called behind her as she moved away.

"Your Highness!"

Jennie sighed, frowning. Beckoning, she ordered Baroness Cinael away for a moment, and when her lady had departed, Eunwoo walked quickly to overtake her.

"Please allow me to explain..." he began.

"I don't know what you mean."

"Your Highness, this is a misunderstanding," he said, moving closer. Jennie moved a step back.

"I don't know what you're talking about," she said coolly.

"Our meeting at the bookstore was a coincidence. Trust me."

He expected her to agree. But Jennie didn't want to believe him.

And nothing would change even if it was a coincidence. The bruises he had left on her arms had wounded Liam's heart, and hurt Mura even worse.

For the sake of her loved ones, Jennie didn't want to get anywhere near him.

Besides, the look in his eyes made her feel uncomfortable. It reminded her of how she used to feel in front of Jongin, or Seokjin.

Goosebumps prickled on her skin as soon as she thought it. Memories

she wanted to forget stabbed at her heart. She didn't want to stay with him a second longer. It looked like Eunwoo had more he wanted to say, but Jennie offered him only a perfunctory farewell.

"See you at the banquet," she said, and disappeared.

Leaving Eunwoo alone again. Just like the last time.

"...you're difficult," Eunwoo murmured, his face expressionless.

But a slow smile soon spread.

"It's more fun that way," he whispered.

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## Chapter 192

### Chapter 192 — Performance

The aristocracy of Estia was excited. For the first time in a long time, there was going to be a state banquet. As night fell, carriage after carriage rolled up to the palace.

Mura, who had vanished with Liam all day, returned in time to assist Jennie with dressing. She wore a purple silk dress with jeweled accessories, gifts that Liam had given her. Just as she was giving herself a final inspection in the mirror, another small visitor appeared.

"Mama."

Leo approached, his small face sad, and Jennie quickly bent to comfort him as he hugged the skirt of her gown.

"I wanna go with you," he said.

"No, Leo," she said. The feast would go on late into the night. Even the process of dressing for such an event was exhausting, never mind the banquet itself.

It was far too tedious for a child, and she did not want him to be present. "A good boy would go to bed early."

"Don't want to," Leo said. "Have to p'tect Mama."

His face was surprisingly fierce.

"Have to go with Mama," he insisted, and when she tried to push him away, he clung stubbornly to her skirt. "No! Wanna go with Mama!"

As they were arguing, Liam appeared in the doorway. He had already finished dressing for the banquet, and for a moment, Jennie couldn't take her eyes from him. She hadn't had time to pay much attention to Liam's appearance for a while, and he looked marvelous in his Kurkan-style clothing. He was very handsome with his hair perfectly

combed back.

"Leo," he said sternly, pulling his son away from Jennie's gown and easily suppressing his rebellion. "Your mother has made a decision."

"But..."

"And the nights belong to your father."

Leo tugged his father down to whisper something in his ear. Liam's eyes narrowed.

"I promise, Leo," he said, and gave the boy a quick smile.

That was enough that he finally stopped trying to follow her, and Genin bent to pick him up.

"I'll take you to your room," she said, bowing. The little boy shouted over her shoulder as they were leaving.

"Tomorrow, I get to p'tect Mama..!"

Liam smiled as he extended his hand to Jennie, following the etiquette of Estia. It made her give a small smile.

The two murmured quietly together as they walked hand in hand to the banquet, and Liam spent some time telling her how beautiful she looked.

"You should speak carefully tonight," he said as they approached the banquet hall.

It was a vague warning, but Jennie knew they were not meaningless words. She nodded.

"Not yet..." He added, a smiling refusal to offer more details. "I will tell you more when I am sure."

Maybe it was related to whatever business he had been at early that day, when he had gone out with all the Kurkans.

"All right. I'll be careful."

"Aren't you curious?" Liam asked at the unhesitating answer.

"Of course," Jennie replied, tightening her grip on his hand. "But you must have a reason not to tell me right now."

Liam stopped abruptly, and the entourage behind them halted at once. He looked at her for a long moment.

"You are beautiful just when you speak," he muttered, with a glint in his eyes she recognized. He would have kissed her there and then, if she weren't so carefully dressed for the banquet.

Jennie's fingernail trailed ticklishly over his palm. Liam lifted an eyebrow.

"Don't do that," he warned. "It'll stand up."

Quickly, he withdrew his hand, and they headed for the banquet hall.

The emissaries from Cha had already arrived.

After concluding their conversation with some Estian nobles, they immediately came forward to greet Jennie and Liam.

Her eyes met Eunwoo's, who was approaching at the front of the delegation. Immediately, his eyes flashed a greeting, and Jennie looked away, pretending not to have noticed.

But where was the Queen of Cha?

She was not at the King's side. Even as Jennie looked over the other dignitaries, she saw someone who resembled the Queen. Though she had heard rumors that the two had a bad relationship, she had not expected the Queen to refuse to attend a public event.

It would be considered a major diplomatic breach if the Queen did not attend. And Cha was not in a position to make such blunders with Estia.

But she did not think Eunwoo was someone stupid enough to make such obvious mistakes. It was hard to guess what his intentions might be.

"Let the light shine on Estia," he said. "I am Eunwoo of Cha."

He greeted her graciously, with a light kiss on the back of her hand. There was no obvious sexual intent in his greeting.

"We have prepared a light entertainment as thanks for Estia's hospitality."

The watching nobility looked interested at the word entertainment. Jennie nodded her approval to allow whatever Cha had prepared to be presented in the banquet hall.

"I hope you enjoy it," Eunwoo told Jennie, smiling.

To the rhythm of music, women entered the banquet hall, dancers dressed in the Kurkan style. All eyes were focused on this talented display in the center of the hall.

Jennie watched, but without much interest. But suddenly, she cocked her head to one side. Among the many dancers, there was one that stood out, a lone woman dressed in red when all the other dancers were dressed in white.

She had emerald eyes seductive as a snake's, and a mole under one eye only accentuated the beauty of her face. Her dancing was sensual, displaying the attributes of her body, as if her red clothes were rose petals fluttering around her.

The eyes of the watchers were drawn more and more to her, and she was obviously pleased to realize it.

The music moved faster. The moment it reached its crescendo, the dancers all threw their hands upward together, raising swaths of concealing fabric up into walls.

That fabric blocked everyone's vision, and the eyes of the watching Kurkans went cold. As one, their pupils contracted. But as the curtains of fabric dropped, and no weapons were revealed behind them, the Kurkans began applauding as cheerfully as if nothing had ever happened.

All that had changed was the dancer in red. Now she wore gold

jewelry, a long cloak, and a small crown upon her head. It was far too rich for a simple dancer, and she approached Jennie and Liam in graceful, dancing strides, her jewelry jingling.

"Let the light shine on Estia. "

She stopped before Jennie and Liam, laying her hand upon her breast.

"I am the Queen of Cha, Nancy."

There was a commotion among those present at the words. No one had ever heard of a Queen presenting herself in such an unconventional manner, and murmurs rose among the Estian nobility. The emissaries of Cha, however, were indifferent. They appeared to be used to it.

Jennie had heard such decadence was common in Cha, but she hadn't expected anything like this.

Jennie tried to hide her reactions, but their culture was truly shocking.

Ignoring all the murmurs, Nancy looked directly at Liam.

"It is a pleasure to meet the King of Kurkan."

Cha was seeking peace with Estia. Estia's ruler was Jennie.

But Queen Nancy was pointedly ignoring her, even when she was standing right before her. Incensed, Jennie opened her mouth to reprimand the woman, but then she felt a warmth on her hand. Liam had reached for her. But when she turned to look at him, he was looking at Nancy.

"Strange," he said. "Isn't Cha supposed to be seeking peace with Estia?"

The Queen's eyes widened slightly at the blunt question. In diplomatic terms, it was surprising for anyone to be so straightforward.

"We want a good relationship with both kingdoms," she soon responded nonchalantly.

She smiled. The enchanting scent of perfume wafted forth.

"Especially...deeper relations with Kurkan."

It was impossible to misunderstand what she meant.

Her eyes sparkled, filled with confidence that Liam would not be able to resist her charms.

Liam wrapped his arm around Jennie's waist.

"That's a pity, when I only listen to my wife."

Liam's reply echoed through the silent banquet hall.

Nancy's face stiffened.

It appeared she hadn't expected him to reject her so openly. For the moment it took to compose herself, she couldn't speak.

"...I see," she managed.

Her eyes shifted to Jennie, pointedly observing her.

"I am pleased to meet the Queen of Estia," she added with a smile. "I hope the Queen will allow friendly relations between Cha and Kurkan."

There was a ripple of murmuring at the provocation.

"I will allow it," Jennie replied, deadpan.

Nancy's eyebrow lifted.

"But unfortunately there are some things in this world that are impossible no matter how you try," Jennie sighed, laying her hand on Liam's arm, which was wrapped tightly around her waist, and allowed a small smile, as if she were enjoying herself. "It looks like it will be difficult for you to get what you want."

Nancy's eyes chilled, and her plump lips quivered once at the humiliation. But then she lifted her chin, as if nothing had happened.

"Thank you for your permission, Your Highness," Nancy said, and led the dancers back out of the banquet hall.

Instantly, there was an uproar.

Jennie did not like that woman. She really believed she could achieve her goal by acting like a bitch. And as hostess of the banquet, Jennie had to retrieve the situation.

"That was a wonderful show," she said, looking at Eunwoo instead of the retreating Nancy. "I did not expect that from Cha."

Eunwoo smiled. He seemed to have enjoyed watching his queen's misfortune.

"It is an honor, Your Highness."

"I hope you enjoy Estia's banquet from now on."

"I will enjoy it to the fullest."

She sensed innuendo in his words, but Jennie only smiled and signaled for the musicians. The music filled the hall again.

The Estian nobles behaved as if nothing had happened, but on every face among the Cha delegation, tension was palpable.

"Aren't you going to praise me?" Liam whispered, interrupting her thoughts. Jennie giggled. Liam could be as insistent as Leo. "Hurry up."

As soon as no one was looking, Jennie turned to kiss his cheek

"Thank you," he said, satisfied. "Now I feel better."

Liam sat back, smiling contentedly.

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## Chapter 193

### Chapter 193 — Threat

"It doesn't make any sense."

Nancy's voice rose shrilly as she shouted.

"This can't be happening!"

Nancy grabbed her hair, her voice filled with disbelief.

"He didn't show any interest in me...!"

Nancy had been surrounded by men all her life. She had never failed to attract any man she wanted with her seductive gaze, and had seen no reason why this time would be any different.

She liked Liam, even though his eyes were a bit scary. His chiseled face, his muscled body, his rich tanned skin, which was so rare on the continent...all of it made him even more attractive. She wanted to have him.

Nancy gritted her teeth at the memory of her humiliation at the banquet. Unable to contain her temper, she turned her head and shouted at the man lying on a couch nearby.

"Eunwoo!"

Eunwoo leaning back over the arm of the couch, scowling. His fingers rose to gently massage his temples.

"Do it on your own. We agreed that we would each manage our own targets," he reminded her, and then smiled suddenly. "Or are you losing faith in yourself?"

"...Crazy bastard," Nancy said hysterically. "You're the one that needs to do your job. Give it to me, where is it?"

Eunwoo silently pointed to a nearby nightstand. There were two glass bottles on it filled with a suspicious liquid with an ominous sheen.



Nancy slipped one of the bottles into a pocket.

"Do you really think you'll get a chance to use it?" Eunwoo asked mockingly.

"Shut up. We'll see who gets there first."

Nancy left, slamming the door behind her, and Herod rose, laughing. Picking up the remaining glass bottle, he looked at it for some time.

He could not have imagined that the woman he met in the bookstore would turn out to be the Queen of Estia. It was an incredible coincidence. Fate was sometimes capricious.

It didn't matter to him that she had that barbarian king for her husband; Eunwoo fully intended to seduce her anyway. Now he had been spared the effort of having to find her, and their little misunderstanding would pose no obstacle.

Her silver hair had looked so elegant, shining in the light of the chandeliers. Her purple eyes looked like jewels. In every way, she was a perfect woman. No part of her body was disappointing.

Now he understood why they called her the fairy of Estia. It would be worth losing his own life, if it meant he could have her. Of course, Eunwoo intended to live a long life afterward.

"Of course, Nancy has to succeed at her own task to make it happen..." He muttered to himself.

For a while, Eunwoo was lost in thought. Estia's power was increasing with the support of Kurkan, which put the other nearby kingdoms at a disadvantage.

Originally, Cha had had a strong influence on its neighbors, but had lost all prominence to Estia.

Eunwoo was trying to turn back the clock. Estia must be weakened so that Cha could regain its lost dominance. And to do that, he must separate Estia from Kurkan.

That was the reason he came all this way with Nancy, even though

he did not like his queen. But now he felt genuine desire for the Queen of Estia.

Herod shook the glass bottle in his hand. He had hoped he wouldn't have to use it, but since Nancy was throwing tantrums, he should probably do it as soon as possible. Normally he preferred to move slowly, and take his time with his meal, but it wasn't bad once in a while to feast.

Setting the bottle down, he went outside. He wanted to smoke a little.

The garden was quiet in the evening. He could hear the distant sound of music from the banquet hall, and Herod hummed along inside. He was walking quietly until he came to an abrupt stop.

The scent of cigar smoke reached his nose. It was a unique blend that he had never smelled in his life, fresh and subtly sweet in its finish.

Eunwoo looked around, searching for the source of the scent. Then he found himself looking into bright golden eyes that showed clearly even in the dark.

How is it possible that I didn't notice?

Strange that he had not noticed that presence sooner. The burly man was leaning against a tree and smoking, and as he looked at Eunwoo, he exhaled a plume.

It gave Eunwoo a strange feeling. Those eyes were not like human eyes.

A chill went down his spine, but Eunwoo greeted him with indifference.

"I didn't expect to find you here, King of Kurkan."

Liam offered a subtle smile in response to the words.

At that smile, a thought ran through Herod's mind: maybe the Kurkan King had expected this.

"I'd like to smoke one too, if you don't mind."

Liam didn't answer, but that silence was not an order to leave. Eunwoo lit his own cigar. As the scent of the smoke began to spread through the place, the silent Kurkan spoke for the first time.

"Ah," he said, smiling as he spoke. "That was the smell."

Eunwoo held his breath, forgetting to exhale the smoke of his cigar. Those words were so cold, cold as a blade of ice, and made goosebumps rise on his skin.

Fortunately, the darkness of the night allowed him to keep his pride. Eunwoo forced a smile.

"...is something wrong?" He asked, striving to keep his voice neutral.

Liam exhaled a slow plume of smoke, prolonging the silence until Eunwoo grew impatient.

"I don't like it," he answered.

Liam was all but saying outright that the smoke of Eunwoo's cigar was bothering him. While he was smoking a cigar himself. It was so unbelievable, for a moment, Eunwoo doubted his own ears.

But suddenly alarm bells rang in his mind, and his mouth went dry with nervousness. His pride would not let him retreat with his tail between his legs.

He remembered what had happened in the banquet hall, when Liam had put his arm possessively around the Queen's waist. He had never once made eye contact with Eunwoo, as if Eunwoo were beneath his notice.

In many instances, the savage had acted recklessly, disregarding all etiquette. It was a clear sign of how little respect he had for Cha.

Lowly barbarians.

Brutes who used to be slaves, and now they were so arrogant that they wanted to rule the continent.

Eunwoo's anger gradually swallowed his fear.

He drew another puff from his cigar, carefully selecting the words that would displease the barbarian, and spoke them in a long exhalation of smoke.

All manner of things can happen in the social circles of Cha..."

There was a great deal of debauchery in Cha. It was even said in the continent that if one wanted to learn about colors, one should go to Cha.

It was true that the aristocratic circles of Cha were known for engaging in unimaginable sexual acts. The King and Queen often participated themselves, though they knew the social disorders that arose from promiscuity. But Eunwoo spoke as if he were relating an interesting story.

"Lately, it has been an interesting pastime to exchange partners between couples for sex..."

Eunwoo glanced over to make sure that Liam was listening.

"There was no punishment, as it was a consensual affair between everyone involved. In Cha, this is not something to be punished, unless it is forced. I believe it's becoming somewhat fashionable," he added with a chuckle. "Sometimes couples need to indulge more exotic pleasures."

He looked at Liam with narrowed eyes.

"Perhaps you would be interested?" He added, his voice suggestive. "As you saw, my wife is very beautiful. And she enjoys that sort of thing."

Throwing the butt of his cigar on the ground, he stubbed it out under the sole of his shoe, and laughed.

"Don't you think that would be funny?"

Liam laughed along with him, as if he had just heard a very entertaining story, and for a moment Eunwoo wondered if the savage

might actually be interested.

"...Kk!"

But then suddenly his feet were dangling above the ground.

Liam had lifted Eunwoo by the neck in one hand, and was still calmly holding his cigar between the fingers of the other.

Eunwoo was choking. He tried to claw at the hand squeezing his throat with his fingernails, but no scratches appeared on that tough hide. His eyes darkened.

"I recently cut out someone's tongue because they were talking nonsense," Liam said. "Maybe I should geld you."

Liam blew a long plume of smoke into Eunwoo face, and the King of Cha's eyes teared, searing in the smoke before Liam flung his body aside as if it were trash.

"Ha, haa..." Eunwoo drew in panicked breaths, and Liam clicked his tongue, looking at him.

"You can wait quietly, and I'll kill you," he said.

"Why are you in such a hurry?"

There was a cracking and snapping noise of an object breaking. Eunwoo, who lay gasping on the ground, belatedly realized he was missing his glasses.

Liam walked away, putting his cigar back to his lips.

"Good night, King of Cha."

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## Chapter 194

### Chapter 194 — Secret

On the second day of the banquet, Liam left early in the morning again.

Jennie thought the palace felt a little cold, since he had taken all the Kurkans with him. He had told her he wouldn't be able to attend the banquet that day, and he probably wouldn't even come back that night.

Jennie was sure that his departure had something to do with Cha.

Their intentions had already been discovered. They had planned to try to seduce Jennie and Liam to sever the alliance between their kingdoms. But they had chosen bizarre ways to pursue that goal. They weren't just trying to seduce them, they were doing so publicly and rudely, jeopardizing their existing peace agreement with Estia.

She didn't think they would risk it unless they were convinced that Jennie and Liam would fall into their hands. There was some factor that was giving them unwarranted confidence. Liam had probably left the palace to discover what it was.

It seemed like a bad sign that he was keeping it hidden, and Jennie hoped he would figure it out soon. She trusted Liam, but she was still sad that he was gone again, so soon after returning from war.

But she didn't have much time to feel lonely, with Leo.

"Little wolf goes woooooo! Lots of woووoo! So cute!"

Leo sang the strange song as he bounced ahead of her, and Jennie smiled, watching his flying silver hair.

She had decided to spend the afternoon with him, since she hadn't had time to play with him the night before, and Leo was wandering all over the palace.

She followed him for a long while until they finally came to some

chairs in the garden, and she sat down.

She could hear the sound of water from a fountain.

After she dissuaded Leo from hunting down the birds singing in the trees, she drew him over to ask a question.

"What were you and your father talking about yesterday?"

She was curious. The two had been very secretive.

And she was even more concerned because Liam had looked so serious, after Leo had finished whispering to him.

"No. Secret."

"You can tell your mother, too."

"No, I promised, it's a secret."

Leo covered his mouth with his hand, and Jennie decided to pull out her own secret weapon.

"You don't want to tell your mother?"

"Uh..."

"I see," she said. "I feel sad..."

Leo's eyes widened, as Jennie lowered her head as if she were about to cry.

"Mama!"

Leo rushed over to comfort her so she wouldn't cry.

Jennie had barely begun to work up a sob before Leo confessed.

"I had a dream..." he said. "Mama ate something bad."

"Something bad?"

"Yes."

Liam had already warned her not to eat anything suspicious. It would be strange if he had warned her about it because of a child's dream, as if Leo's dreams might actually be premonitions.

She knew who she ought to speak to about this. Jennie made a mental note to ask Morga. A small hand touched hers as she was thinking.

"It's okay, Mama," Leo said, puffing proudly. "I'll p'tect Mama. I always protected Mama, even before I was born."

Leo mimicked the claws of a wolf with his hands, and Jennie stroked her son's head. Sometimes he told stories about what happened before he was born, as if he remembered all of his battles when he was still inside her womb. As painful as that experience had been, he did not seem bothered by it.

On the contrary, he was always boasting about how he had protected his mother.

And in addition to her child's warnings, there was another dinner scheduled before tonight's banquet, with the emissaries from Cha. She felt exhausted just thinking about having to deal with both King Eunwoo and Queen Nancy alone.

Well, not entirely alone.

*Take Leo with you*, Liam had said. He had been insistent that Leo should go to the dinner. *You need another escort, since you do not have Mura.*

He had added that she would feel more at ease if she took Leo with her. Even though he was only a small child, Liam considered Leo a full Kurkan.

"So, Mama, don't be scared!" Leo was already determined to fulfill his role as his mother's escort, and Jennie hugged him, smiling.

"Of course, Mama trusts Leo."

Though even as she praised Leo for his bravery, Jennie thought that she would do the best to handle the situation herself, and keep him



out of harm's way.

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## Chapter 195

### Chapter 195 — Poison

That night Jennie went to dinner with Leo. The prince wore a formal suit with a bow at his collar, carried in Baroness Cinael's arms and telling her all about the delicious lemon sorbet he had eaten the other day. He wanted to eat more.

As Jennie walked down the corridor, the sun had already gone down, and dusk had been replaced by darkness. There were many lights in the palace to drive it back, but it seemed that they cast very long shadows.

The sight of those swaying shadows made her heart inexplicably flutter. At that moment, Leo hopped out of Baroness Cinael's arms and came to walk beside Jennie, looking up at her and smiling.

He was just like his father. Somehow Leo didn't even give her a chance to think bad thoughts. Jennie walked the rest of the way to the banquet hall with a smile on her face. But as soon as the doors opened, she realized her ominous premonitions had been correct.

In all the large banquet hall, only one person was seated.

"I've been expecting you."

Eunwoo was the only one there, and rose from his chair to greet her. Jennie smiled wryly. He had come alone, even though all the emissaries of Cha had been invited to supper. Since it had been difficult to create an opportunity for a private conversation with her, he had resorted to this.

"Your Highness..." Baroness Cinael said quietly, an unspoken question about what they should do. Jennie responded by entering the hall.

She wanted to see how far he would go. She sat down opposite him with a cool smile on her face, and Leo climbed into the seat beside him. Eunwoo beckoned to an attendant behind them to have their food brought.

Watching him, Jennie blinked in surprise. Eunwoo wasn't wearing his glasses today, and it was strange to see his face without them. But that wasn't the only unusual thing. In spite of the warm weather, he was wearing a high-necked shirt.

Jennie eyed him stealthily. There were faint red marks on his neck.

Hand marks...?

It almost looked as if someone had tried to strangle him. She glanced again, wondering if she had made some mistake, but Eunwoo turned back to face her, and the marks were hidden again.

"I'm sorry that I came alone," he said with a smile.

"There's nothing to be sorry about," Jennie replied, her face expressionless. "I am just curious. I wonder what Cha is planning, to keep doing things like this. Is it war you want?"

Eunwoo laughed as if she had made a joke.

"Of course not."

It wasn't worth bothering to try to ask any more questions; he would only offer more nonsense. The supper began, and for a while, everything went quietly.

Jennie was dutifully eating her meal, and Eunwoo was offering casual chatter to make conversation. He even complimented Leo as the boy tore into his meat.

"The prince is very handsome."

But his eyes were fixed on Jennie, not Leo.

"I've heard that silver hair is a sign of the royal family of Estia," he said. "The more I see it, the more interesting it becomes."

His eyes ran over her hair and lingered on her face, and Jennie frowned slightly. It was difficult to make eye contact with him, now that his glasses weren't covering his face, and there was a strange madness in his eyes today. Like a man who had been backed into a

corner.

Eunwoo wiped his mouth with a napkin and lifted his hand to beckon the attendant to approach.

"I have brought you a gift, as an apology."

He added a graceful explanation of the famous Cha wine, and Jennie had heard of it; it was a valuable vintage.

Taking the bottle from the attendant, he personally uncorked it, and poured it, filling a full glass.

Jennie accepted the cup when he handed it to her, and Leo stopped eating, his gaze shifting to the glass.

Gently, she swirled the glass, smelling its aroma. She liked the scent of the wine, but she couldn't quite bring the glass to her mouth after Liam's warning.

Eunwoo had uncorked the bottle before her. It should be safe to drink. But Jennie had absolute faith in her husband's words.

Jennie decided to pretend to drink the wine.

But the moment she lifted it to her mouth, the glass flew out of her hand and struck the marble floor with a loud crack, and Leo was standing on the table.

It all happened so fast, it was impossible to follow with her eyes. But Jennie could see the knife in Leo's small hand, pointing at Eunwoo's neck.

"You leave my mama alone," he snarled, his eyes narrowed. "Or you'll be sorry."

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Nancy's ladies-in-waiting took great care in dressing her.

Her dress was simple, but fit her well, highlighting the shape of her body. They also spent a lot of time styling her hair, and when they were done, all of her ladies were amazed at the result.

"My God..."

"Magnificent. Even a heart made of stone would race."

Nancy pulled a robe on over her gown and left the palace, satisfied.

The King of Kurkan had planned to spend the night outside the palace instead of attending the banquet, and Nancy had asked her subordinates to find his location. When she discovered he was going to spend the night at an inn, it seemed like a signal to proceed with a tryst.

Throughout the whole carriage ride to the inn, she was so excited, she couldn't stop smiling. He must be interested in her. Surely, he had only acted as if he were indifferent because there had been so many people watching in the banquet hall.

When the carriage arrived at the inn, Nancy got out and instructed the coachman to wait there until early the next morning, then hurried inside the inn.

But as soon as she opened the door, Nancy sensed something was wrong.

A prickling sensation raced over her skin, as if hundreds of needles were pricking her at the same time. It was a phantom pain from all the stares.

There were dozens of Kurkans in the inn. Sitting freely on the tables, chairs, even on the stairs and in the window sills, perched on the railing of the second floor.

It seemed no coincidence that they were all there, especially when all

of them stopped at once and turned to look at Nancy, all those eyes unblinking.

Those stares were like an invisible blade pointed at her throat. If she even breathed wrong, her whole body would break apart. If she had been only a little less bold, she might have fainted on the spot.

It felt as if she had become prey, with bait in her mouth. Nancy's face paled, and her eyes darted in one direction.

The man she was searching for was sitting at a table at the back of the inn. And though she hadn't consciously tried to find him, her eyes were drawn by the force of his presence.

Nancy spoke, thinking of his name.

"Oh, Kurkan King!"

Liam watched her silently and gently waved her over. It let her catch her breath again, and as soon as she did, she felt more confident. It was clear that this man had been waiting for her.

"I have something to tell you, so I came to find you, even if it is impolite," Nancy said, clasping her hands together and looking at him with moist eyes. "It's about the peace agreement. But I don't want others to hear...could we speak privately?"

As she requested it so politely, Liam granted it.

"Everyone withdraw."

The Kurkans disappeared the moment they heard his command. Nancy felt a shiver down her spine as she watched them disappear, melting into the shadows. Even seeing it with her own eyes, she could barely believe it.

"So what do you want, Queen?"

At the sound of his pleasant voice, Nancy gathered herself. At last, it was just the two of them, and the desire to have him seized her. Her heart raced, and she felt a tingling of anticipation between her legs.

She was sure that after tonight, she would have the King of Kurkan in the palm of her hand. Especially since she had brought it.

Nancy acted boldly. Removing her robe, she sat down before Liam, and even with such recklessness, he did not reproach her.

Smiling softly, she looked down at the table. There was a deep bowl on the table, filled with wrinkled brown fruit.

She had heard that Kurkans frequently ate dates.

That was probably where the sweet scent was coming from. It seemed fitting to pair their sweetness with the drink she had brought. Nancy set the bottle of wine on the table with satisfaction. The dates seemed like a good omen.

"First, may I offer you a drink?"

In the wine bottle, it had been carefully added through a hole in the cork. The cork had then been repaired with no visible difference. The taste of the wine would not be greatly affected, as it had been made so recently.

Nancy was confident that she could have slowly seduced him and made him hers without it, but if she had delayed any longer, Eunwoo might have succeeded with the Estian queen. Nancy hated to lose to him.

She set the bottle of wine on the table.

"I need a glass..."

Just as she was about to say that she would go and find a cup, Liam overturned the deep platter of dates. The fruits scattered across the table, and Liam extended the plate across the table to her.

"Serve it," he ordered.

Nancy offered a saccharine smile. His gruff demeanor only made him more attractive. She would love it if he were the same way in bed.

Nancy leaned forward to pour the wine, bending so Liam could better

appreciate the curves of her body.

When the deep platter was filled with wine, Liam drank it without hesitation, his Adam's apple bobbing as he swallowed. Soon, the platter was empty.

Nancy bit her lip. It was hard to contain her laughter when she thought that soon this arrogant Kurkan would be on his knees, begging for her love.

She looked at him expectantly. Soon, the potion would take effect.

But it was strange. Even after quite some time passed, there was no reaction. Those golden eyes were still calm. The storm of passion that Nancy had been braced for did not arrive.

Why? She had used this potion many times in the past. She had never had to wait so long for it to take effect. Something was wrong.

As her nervousness increased, a large tanned hand reached to lightly shake the wine bottle. Liam's lips curved as he looked at the liquid remaining in the bottle.

"It's poisoned."

Distracted by his golden eyes, Nancy was a second late in answering.

"...What?"

Liam slowly tipped the bottle over, pouring the wine onto the floor. The sweet smell of the wine filled the air.

The red liquid splashed her feet, and Nancy was too stunned to realize that the wine had stained the skirt of her gown. She rose from her seat in shock.

"Oh, how did you know—no, it's obviously the right bottle, it can't be..."

Liam picked up one of the dates lying on the table.



"Does it look like I'm in love?"

There was nothing she could say. Nancy retreated, watching him, and then started as a voice suddenly spoke behind her.

"The Cha King is going to give this to Jennie, too?"

Two Kurkans had appeared behind them. The Kurkan woman's face was grim.

"I think this is worse than attempting to assassinate her."

Liam laughed.

"Oh, yes," he agreed. "It is a very serious crime."

One by one, the Kurkans emerged from the shadows, and the empty inn quickly filled.

Nancy's vision went black at the uncontrollable terror that gripped her. A loud ringing echoed in her ears, and the watching Kurkans chuckled as she trembled.

"Queen of Cha." A Kurkan man leaned closer to Nancy to ask. "Have you heard what happened to the ones that tried to assassinate our Queen?"

Nancy could not answer. Her eyes shifted from side to side, searching for some way to escape. The man frowned.

"You don't know, right?" He said, regretful. There was a strange sympathy in his voice. "Then you'll find out soon."

A piercing scream shook the inn. A second red liquid joined the wine on the floor.

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## Chapter 196

### Chapter 196 — Too Dangerous

Jennie's dinner had ended badly.

Leo, the Prince of Estia, had plunged his knife into the side of King Herod's neck, a deep and serious gash.

Eunwoo left quickly for a secondary palace, staunching the bleeding with a napkin. He was treated by a doctor there.

From the moment Leo took out his knife, the situation could have turned very unfavorable to Estia. But for some reason, Cha did not protest.

They kept so silent, it was as if they had offered an offense.

The servants of the palace, who considered Leo just a cute little boy, were quite shocked. The friendly little prince had suddenly become like a beast, who attacked a guest to the palace with a knife.

They expected him to receive a severe punishment, but Jennie did not order one. Leo had been risking his life for his mother since before he was born.

Eunwoo must have tampered with the wine. She had no idea how Leo could have known that, but the little boy had thwarted his plans.

She put the child to bed early and kissed his forehead.

"Thank you for protecting me," she whispered.

"Ahh..."

Leo yawned hugely, and laid his hand on her cheek.

"I love you, Mama..." he whispered.

Those were the words he could say most clearly, because he had said them so many times. Soon after his sleepy confession, Leo fell asleep,

and Jennie stayed behind him, stroking his hair.

Sighing, she straightened and went to her room. She could have gone back to the banquet hall, but in the end, she decided not to attend. It wasn't as if Cha was going to enjoy the festive atmosphere right now, either.

It was still too early to sleep, so Jennie decided to find some books to read. There was a nook in her room where she kept her books, and a couch the size of a small bed beneath her window. She liked to sit and read there, with the sunlight or the moonlight shining through the window.

Sitting on the couch, she pulled out the bookmark of the book she had bought from the bookshop the other day, immersing herself in the pages. The book was written in a mixture of ancient languages, which made it hard to read if she wasn't concentrating.

Suddenly, she heard a noise.

".....?"

Jennie's eyes widened as she glanced automatically up at the window, and she rose quickly to push it open. A man climbed up to sit in the window sill.

"Liam!" Jennie exclaimed, and sighed. "Why do you keep coming in through the window?"

"Because I'm in a hurry."

She didn't understand why he was in such a hurry, it had to be the window rather than a door. But as he entered, she cocked her head curiously.

Normally, he would have embraced her as soon as he arrived. But now he stayed where he was, sitting on the window sill and watching her, unmoving.

She looked at him more closely. It looked to her like his face was a little red, though it was hard to tell with his back to the moonlight.

She could feel the heat emanating from his body. His temperature was always high, but right now it was unusually so. But when she reached to put her hand on his forehead, Liam shook his head.

"Don't touch me."

Jennie's mouth fell open in shock. Liam had never rejected her touch before.

"You better not touch me," Liam corrected, smiling a little at her surprise.

"What are you talking about? Are you sick? Do you have the plague?"

"It might be worse than that," Liam said, muttering something else she couldn't catch. "I drank it to see. Anyway, magic doesn't affect me."

Then Jennie saw it. The front of his trousers was bulging.

Her face heated instantly. She didn't know the details as to why he was in that condition, but she could guess it was because of whatever he had drunk.

"You should have had Morga check it, if there was something suspicious!" She exclaimed, her face flushed.

"That would have taken too long," Liam replied, disgruntled. "I had to get rid of him, he's always after you—"

Liam interrupted himself with a growl, licking his lips as he looked at Jennie.

"Haa...I think it's going to explode."

She didn't even have to ask what was about to explode.

"...Can I help you?"

"No."

"Why?"

Liam laughed. His eyes were glowing like fire.

"Because it might be too dangerous."

Liam was not exaggerating. He was honestly expressing the reality of his current condition.

The pupils of his golden eyes had constricted severely. Far from human, they looked more like the eyes of a ravenous beast. Jennie caught the scent of blood wafting from him and shivered automatically.

Liam sensed her fear instantly, and covered his inhuman eyes with his hand.

"I just came to be sure nothing bad had happened to you—"

"Li."

A short growl escaped him, as if she had struck him in a vulnerable spot. But then his lips curved and his fingers slid apart, allowing his shining golden eyes to peek through.

"I am trying to hold back," he said, purring with mischief.

Jennie shook her head.

"You can be hard on me."

His smile disappeared. His voice dropped an octave.

"Don't say things like that."

"I really don't mind."

Liam stood very still.

"I won't be able to stop," he warned, his eyes fixed on her. "Even if you beg me in tears."

"All right," Jennie said, holding her hand out to him.

This man, who could snatch a flying arrow from the air, couldn't

avoid the slowly approaching hand. "I want to help you, Liam."

The moment her fingertips brushed his chest there was a cracking sound as the window sill beneath Liam splintered in his hand. She felt a moment's misgiving as Liam caught her wrist hard.

"I warned you."

Once she was in his arms, there was no escape. Jennie tugged at Liam's clothes, thinking she probably was not going to die, and Liam instantly pulled off his robes. The two soon fell together onto a couch.

Liam removed her gown by simply tearing it in half. He had already ruined a significant number of her dresses.

When Jennie wrapped her arms around his neck, she was shocked at the heat of his skin, as if something were boiling beneath it. She rubbed his shoulders, trying to cool him, but all that did was make him groan harshly.

Liam stiffened. She could feel his muscles tensing under her palms, and his hot lips kissed slowly up her neck, and then roughly caught her lips. Their tongues intertwined in a frenzied kiss.

His hands slid to her thighs as she was lost in his kiss, squeezing so hard he left marks before he pushed them apart. The wet flesh between her legs was exposed.

"Haa..."

Liam exhaled, lowering his eyes to her opening, and then lowering his mouth there without hesitation.

His tongue stroked wildly, flicking as he sucked at her growing wetness. He nibbled at her swelling clitoris and thrust his tongue deep inside her.

Her vision blurred with the sensations. As he drove his tongue into her, his nose rubbed against her clitoris, and Jennie's body squirmed with the motion of his tongue. She let go of the sofa to grab his hair with her hands.

"Hmm, Liam, do it slow, ahh...!"

It felt different than usual. She was losing her mind, and Liam didn't pause for an instant, even though she was yanking hard on his hair. Suddenly something hard brushed the inside of her leg, and with blurring eyes, she saw that it was his manhood.

As he sucked at her, he was masturbating with one hand, veins throbbing in his manhood, his penis swollen. Sticky liquid beaded and gushed from the tip as if his semen had already begun to flow.

Jennie arched her back with a moan, her body going limp and spasming. She gasped like a person who had just burst through the surface of water, nearly drowning. She trembled without stopping.

Liam stared at Jennie, lust gleaming in his golden eyes. Wickedly, he licked his lips, tasting her wetness on his mouth.

Jennie turned her head, embarrassed, but his large hand cupped her chin.

"Look at me." There was an undercurrent of anxiety in his face. "Don't look away, I need you to look at me, to keep control..."

He was obviously clinging to his sanity, and Jennie wished she could go back in time. It was naive to think she wouldn't die. It seemed likely that today she would be taken straight from this couch to a coffin.

"Liam..."

"I like that."

Liam had been steadily stroking himself, and now he pushed himself against her, placing the head of his manhood against her opening.

"Keep calling me by my name..."

Though his voice was affectionate, he thrust into her fiercely.

Relentlessly, his thick shaft entered her tight channel. Though she had received him countless times, Jennie was still shocked. She felt

too hot, the temperature of his body boiling her from the inside. It was as if he had plunged a fireball into her belly.

"Ah, Liam, hmm, you're too... hot...!"

Her inner walls, wrapped around him, felt so hot that she was tingling inside. Liam sucked her earlobe between his lips and pounded himself in deep, so deep that his balls slapped against her ass.

With every breath, his chest swelled, and after a while he began to whisper her name.

"Jennie, Jennie..."

Jennie opened her arms to hug him, and as her hands ran over his sweat-soaked skin, his muscles tensed.

Liam lunged into her. Placing his hands on either side of her head, he moved his waist. He pulled himself out of her to leave only his tip inside, and then shoved back in hard.

Jennie's upper body jerked from the intensity of his pounding, her breasts swaying up and down. It was so embarrassing, she wanted to cover them, but she couldn't. Liam beat her to it.

"Hmm... ah, ahh!"

The sound of their wet flesh pounding together was so sensual. His waist moved faster and faster, and Jennie moaned every time he penetrated her.

It felt as if she was wrapped in flames. She was so hot, she could feel the blood pulsing through her body.

Her climax came even faster than usual, and Jennie wrapped her legs around his waist tightly. Her lower body was writhing side, almost convulsing, and Liam did not stop even though he must have felt the squeezing of her inner channel.

His virile manhood kept plunging into her like a brand, driving her through her climax. The pleasure continued on and on without end,



building to unbearable levels. Involuntarily, she screamed.

"Ahhhhhh...!"

Something burst inside her, and she spurted liquid as if it were water, the strong scent of her cum soaking the couch, thickening the air. She was so wet inside, every time Liam drove into her, it made a liquid sound, a splashing.

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## Chapter 197

### Chapter 197 — Unbridled

For a moment, she asked him to stop, but Liam was beyond hearing her. Suddenly, his manhood was buried deep inside her, and Liam's lips drew back, baring his teeth. The veins in his neck stood out sharply.

"Agghhh..."

Suddenly, his manhood jetted a torrent of semen into her, and Jennie shuddered as she received it. It was the same boiling heat as his body, as if he were pouring that heat inside her.

And it went on and on, Liam thrusting at intervals, jarring Jennie's body.

She felt like she was going to die.

Tears well in her eyes, so fast that she couldn't even wipe them away. The sound of Liam's voice surprised her.

"Are you crying already...?" He whispered, licking away her tears. "My God. We haven't even started yet..."

Liam didn't believe Jennie was actually dying, but he was still fighting to control himself.

The love potion he had consumed was powerful. Its effect simulated rut in animals, which exponentially increased the power of his desire.

He had been a bit careless. Usually, these things didn't work properly on him. He thought it would be fine this time too, but as time went on, the effects of the potion only got stronger.

As a matter of fact, he couldn't even remember how he had gotten home. He had just hunted instinctively for his mate, and when he came back to himself, he had found himself in the palace. He had followed her scent like a beast.

He had firmly decided to leave after he saw her. He had just wanted a look at her face. He was still telling himself that even as he approached her.

But an emotion was rising that was difficult to control. He had never felt lust like this, so powerful he could barely speak. The rope that strung together his reasoning was weakening, and it seemed the least action from Jennie would snap it.

It would be reckless to have sex with her in this condition. Liam was a Kurkan. Jennie was human.

Normally, he was very careful not to hurt her during sex, but now his instincts were in control. Liam was afraid of his own nature.

But Jennie was not afraid.

She reached out to him when almost anyone else would run away. He couldn't help but take her hand.

From the moment he met her until this moment, Liam always wanted to take her hand.

"Hmm...enough...ahh..."

But Liam only comforted her as he continued thrusting inside her. Jennie's soul had left her.

Finally, Liam rolled over, shifting Jennie on top of him. Unbalanced, she fell forward onto his chest, her face filled with tears as she begged him to slow down, at least.

Liam was very sorry that he could not fulfill his wife's request.

Instead, he would fill her with all his heart. He would give her unforgettable pleasure.

He did not forget to caress her favorite nipple in his fingers. Her nipples had gotten bigger since she had a child. As he rubbed them, his mouth watered, and he lifted his head to suck on them.

Jennie cried and moaned, unable to bear the pleasure. It felt so good

to cry, as if it were a release for the heat inside her from Liam's boiling body.

Jennie's body writhed in huge contortions, overwhelmed with sensation. Pushing off Liam with all her might, she felt his shaft slide out of her, and she fell off the couch onto the floor.

She was crawling over the carpet to escape.

Liam's grin was feral as he watched his prey trying to elude him.

Her actions had the opposite effect. As she crawled with her backside lifted, he could see the redness on her cheeks, the insides of her thighs wet with their shared fluids.

"Jennie."

Mounting her like a dog, he thrust his manhood into her opening.

"Ahh...!"

Jennie buried her face in the carpet, and Liam caressed her trembling back.

"It still feels like it's going to explode," he whispered.

His manhood convulsed with her inner walls, and he bit her neck, trying not to lose himself in the giddy pleasure. Jennie jerked. He had bit her so hard, he left the marks of his teeth in her skin.

Her white skin was a mess. Red marks, teeth marks, the marks of his fingers everywhere. The sight of them only aroused him more. He wanted to feel it all more.

His instincts took over. Liam grabbed her wrists in his hands and pinned her slender calves under his legs. Now she couldn't move. Jennie sobbed beneath him, completely covered by his body.

"Ahh...it hurts..."

"Huh, does it hurt? Where?"

"It itches...inside.... Liam..."

"Then...I have to scratch it more...."

At those words, Jennie tried to struggle. But her body was so immobilized under him, all she could move was her fingers and toes.

Liam watched as she scratched at the carpet with her fingertips, and then made a sharp stabbing motion with his hips. Jennie wobbled under him, intermittent moans escaping her.

"Ahh...hmm....ahh..."

Every time he moved his waist, her shoulders shook. Liam brushed her silver hair aside and sank his teeth into her neck passionately.

Every time he saw Jennie wearing dresses that showed off her shoulders, he couldn't wait to bite her again. Now he had a chance to feast on her until she would have to wear high-necked gowns to conceal the marks of his teeth.

His weeping wife looked so adorable, Liam wanted to eat her alive. As his beastly nature overpowered him, increasingly dangerous thoughts filled his mind, and he had to fight to restrain himself.

Liam smiled cruelly as his wife begged for mercy.

Jennie's body had lost all its strength. She was lying on the floor beneath him, her legs bent, her thighs spread wide. It was a most shameful posture, like a frog sprawling.

Liam slid his hand under her belly. Smiling, he moved his fingers between her legs.

A little bump was captured between his fingers. Her clitoris was taut, and he rubbed it hard, as if he were thrusting himself.

Jennie screamed at the sudden stimulation, so sharp it was nearly painful, her voice filled with both pleasure and pain.

"Ahh... Liam... wa, wait..." She cried out to him, pleading desperately.  
"Ahh... I think I'm going to come..."

By now Jennie knew it wasn't urine that came out of her when she was overly stimulated. Liam was even more aroused by the lewd sound of her words, panting as she spoke.

"Me, too...I think I'm going to come... Jennie..."

Gently, he bit her earlobe. He licked her ear. Jennie shook her head hard, but couldn't escape the pleasure.

The moment he pinched her clitoris between his fingers, the light in her purple eyes went out. Saliva flowed between her open lips.

Desperately, she tried to pull her trembling body away, but Liam wouldn't let go. He held her tightly, thrusting his manhood deep inside her. She could not even speak as she suddenly, violently, came.

".....!"

Liam's hand was suddenly soaking with the liquid squirting from her, even as he spilled his semen inside her, stroking her swollen clitoris. His fluid seeped out of her, streaking past his manhood as if there wasn't enough room inside to contain it.

Jennie collapsed. She might have even temporarily lost consciousness. Liam hugged her weak, trembling body, whispering.

"Jennie...wake up...Yes?"

The heat in his body still wouldn't go away. He had thought he could finally come to his senses after coming a few times in her, but it was quite the opposite. Almost instantly, he hardened again, and he couldn't stop himself from thrusting back into her opening.

His instincts argued that it wasn't enough yet, he hadn't finished, he needed to do it more. He wanted to come inside her until her belly was swollen with him. He wanted to cover her in his scent from head to toe.

Inside, her hot inner walls throbbed. Liam gritted his teeth at the incredible pleasure contracting along his shaft. Normally, he would have been able to restrain himself, but now, no matter how hard he tried...

"Hmm..."

Jennie moaned as she slowly came back to herself, and Liam nuzzled her apologetically, stroking his face against her silver hair.

"Haa.. I'm sorry...I'm sorry Jennie...I love you..."

Somehow, this only made Jennie feel more alarmed, and she tried to struggle. But it was too late. His manhood was already beginning to swell inside her.

She could feel him swelling inside her, pushing against her tight vagina walls. He would not stop until he had spilled every last drop of his semen inside. Liam needed to mark his territory, just as a beast did.

"Ahh...wait, no.....!"

Jennie twisted in fright. It was too much for her body. Liam had controlled himself ever since he knew she was pregnant with Leo, and ever since, they had only had sex that was tame, by his standards.

But now he was mating her so intensely, Jennie was terrified, feeling him swelling unstoppably inside her.

"Ah...I...Li..."

She called his name, her voice hoarse. Liam bit her neck.

"Ah, please...don't call to me like that..."

Every time she called him Li, it made him feel like he was losing his mind. Unconsciously he moved his hips. He could see her pain.

"I'm sorry," he comforted his frightened mate. "It's going to hurt if I pull out now...try not to...tighten on me..."

He lied to her. He told her he would try to come quickly, and she only needed to hold on for a little longer. It was the sort of lie no one should believe, coming from a Kurkan.

Jennie squeezed his hand tightly, and then punched his arm. It was hardly threatening; her body was limp with exhaustion.

"You're going to make me hungry again," Liam whispered, placing his hand on her belly.

Jennie quickly lowered her hand at the heated whisper, and Liam licked her tearstained cheeks.

"That isn't good..." She whispered, her breath sobbing. "But...go on, hnnn... it's too hot..."

Liam apologized over and over, caressing her swollen belly with his hand. She bit her lip, clasping his hands. Her fingers interlaced with his as she looked up at him with moist purple eyes.

"...Are you...better now?"

In spite of her own situation, Jennie was still worried for Liam.

"...I'll help you...until you're well..."

He didn't think now was the time for her to be worrying about him.

Her innocent words made him harden like a stone, and though she didn't know what was happening, Jennie groaned in pain but didn't complain. She was serious about helping him through his rut.

Liam had the urge to mount her again. Before his body could obey the overpowering instinct, he squeezed his eyes shut, fighting for control.

He could clearly smell the scent of her body. All of his instincts had sharpened. The smell of wet female went deep into his lungs and made him dizzy. He felt as if he were dreaming. His manhood buried inside her spurted unceasingly.

His mind was so clouded with pleasure, he hardly realized what he was saying.

"Beautiful...my wife..."



"I love you, I love you... I'm sorry...to bother you..."

Maybe it was because of the love potion. Maybe it was because she kept calling him Li. Maybe it was both, but it was loosening his tongue.

Listening to the whispers, Jennie's ears turned red.

She liked it so much, she deliberately shifted to move her ear closer to his lips. Her breathing grew fast and ragged, and as he whispered I love you again, more of his seed jetted inside her.

"Ahh..."

Jennie's shoulders twitched as she groaned. Her body shuddered. Her inner walls squeezed him repeatedly, as if devouring him.

For a moment, Liam was motionless. He let out a strangled grunt.

"Ahh... Jennie..."

The lust he had been fighting to suppress exploded.

The heat in his eyes flared golden and the last remnant of his reason was incinerated.

"I'm going to...bother you some more."

The words had barely escaped before he was moving. Liam thrust sharply inside her, madly, faster and faster, the slave of his overpowering instinct. It felt as if he would tear her apart, and Jennie briefly lost consciousness, unable to bear it.

Liam didn't stop until he had given her every last drop. Their love went on and on, until the moon vanished, to usher in the dawn.

The sun had risen to its noon height before Liam came back to his senses.

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## Chapter 198

### Chapter 198 — Escape

"Damn it, can't they go faster?! Are they trying to delay?"

Eunwoo was furious. His attendants were moving as fast as if they were on fire. Anyone could have seen they were working as fast as they could, but Eunwoo was not satisfied.

In the end, he couldn't wait. Ahead of his entourage, he rode out of the palace of Estia in haste, only accompanied by his knights. Departing like a thief in the night, rather than the king of a country.

But there was no time to worry about his pride. Eunwoo lashed his horse again with his riding crop.

Nancy was dead.

She had left the palace with an audacious plan to seduce the barbarian king. And she should have succeeded. She had been so beautifully dressed when she went to visit him, only to depart far earlier than expected...minus her head.

The coachman and her knight had returned her body to the palace. They had been waiting for her near the inn the barbarians frequented when suddenly they had heard a scream. They had raced over to the inn, only to see the door open, and a body flung out.

It was the headless body of their queen.

They had come straight back to Eunwoo with her body. Neither of them had even considered going into the inn to collect her head.

The moment he saw her body, Eunwoo knew that things had gone very wrong. In fact, he had sensed it from the beginning of his dinner with the queen.

Right before the young barbarian prince had plunged a knife into the side of his neck, with his eyes glowing just like his father's.

If Jennie had not stopped him, Eunwoo might have been decapitated on the spot. The only difference in the circumstances was that Jennie had not been there to stop the barbarians from killing Nancy.

But there was no way the King of the Kurkan savages would leave Eunwoo alone. He had to escape before they could catch up to him, Eunwoo thought, riding frantically on.

What the hell is going on?

He didn't understand why Nancy's potion hadn't worked. They had both used that potion many times back in Cha. Nancy had often used it on anyone she wanted to possess for her own. She knew how it worked better than anyone else.

Nancy could not have made a mistake.

".....!!"

Suddenly, his horse reared up on its hind legs.

Eunwoo tried to regain control of his panicking horse, but it threw him to the ground, knocking the breath from him. Groaning from the dirt, he lifted his head.

He was alone.

In the shadowy moonlight, he could see no one else.

The knights he had been speaking to only moments before had vanished. Even the horse he was riding had disappeared before he realized it.

His mind was reeling. Nothing felt real. As he stood up, someone approached him from the opposite direction. There was a large round object clutched in his hand.

The man stopped in front of Herod. His back was to the moonlight, so he could not be seen clearly, and Eunwoo squinted up at him. The man smiled, brandishing the object in his hand.

"Aren't you going to take this with you?"

It was Nancy's head.

".....!"

Eunwoo couldn't even scream. The Kurkans who had been lurking invisibly nearby appeared, and surrounded him.

There was a warm wetness in his trousers.

He was so terrified, he had urinated. Pathetic though he was, no one felt the least pity.

Smiling, Mura grabbed him by his hair and flung him to the ground. The dull impact of one blow after another echoed.

"Ahh..."

Eunwoo groaned in pain, his face bloodied. Morga, watching nearby with his hands behind his back, became nervous as it dragged on.

"You must exercise restraint. We cannot be reckless."

Morga's teeth gritted. Because of this fool, he had not been able to visit the palace for several days. Mura bared her teeth in a smile.

"I bowed until I cracked my head because of him. He's not dead yet."

"That's right." Haban moved quickly to his mate's side. "Mura was injured because of him..."

Before the irritated Morga could retort, Genin stepped in between them to mediate.

"I think we should take him back to the palace. I'm sure Liam would like to get his hands on him."

The Kurkans fell silent. They knew Liam had consumed the aphrodisiac, and then vanished with the air of a boiling storm. Mura turned to look at the distant palace with dawning concern.

"I didn't think of it...will Jennie be all right?"

Every Kurkan present was all thinking the same thing.

I don't think she'll be all right.

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Jennie didn't come back to her senses until the sky was colored by sunset. For a while, she sat on the edge of her bed in a daze as the events of the previous night returned one by one back to her mind.

She buried her face in her hands. She had had sex with Liam before when he was rutting, but last night seemed somehow worse.

To call him a depraved beast hardly seemed sufficient, but she couldn't come up with anything better. Jennie groaned inside.

She was so hungry. And she had lost an entire day, so now she had a lot of work to make up. Slowly, she climbed out of bed.

"Ahhh!"

And immediately fell to her knees. Her legs folded under her as soon as she put weight on her feet.

Sitting on the carpet, the pain belatedly flooded her, conquering the daze she had been in since she woke up.

Jennie clutched at her belly with one hand. Her whole body ached as if she had been beaten, and she felt in no condition to move on her own. Angrily, she shouted at the cause of all her woes.

"Liam...!"

Liam appeared immediately with a small bag in one hand. Quickly, he picked Jennie up off the floor.

"When did you wake up? You should be lying down..."

She wanted to scold him, but her throat hurt too much to shout

again. When she reached to rub her sore throat, he quickly brought her some water. He seemed almost embarrassed, and very aware of his mistakes.

After she had moistened her throat, Jennie asked a simple question.

"Are you all right now?"

Liam looked in her direction, but did not meet her eyes.

"I was really worried about you...it's the first time you've done this..."

He sighed, lifting her into his arms without acknowledging the question.

"Should we go wash up?" He asked.

Jennie agreed, wrapping her arms around his neck as he carried her to the bathroom. The small bag he had brought contained a mixture of herbs, which he poured into the bath. Then he helped her undress. Jennie was shocked when she saw her own naked body.

Dousing her shoulders with the herbal-scented water, he washed her hair.

"But what happened?" Jennie asked as he attended her. "Why did you drink that potion?"

"I wanted to be sure it wasn't a real love potion."

Her eyes widened at the way he said it, as if it were a small matter. Liam explained what had happened in detail as he bathed her.

He had decided to be cautious when he learned that Balkat could make love potions. It was a difficult piece of magic, even for a sorcerer like Morga.

Initially, the Kurkans had been sure that the potion would be fake.

Though they had accounted for the possibility that it would work.

"So you took the Kurkans from the palace to investigate it?"

"Yes," he replied. "I was trying to make sure."

They had wanted to find the Tomari they assumed was delivering fake potions to Cha. But as the investigation dragged on, Liam had chosen to make a more direct inquiry himself.

As soon as he drank it, he knew it was fake. But while the potion could not move his heart, it had had a powerful effect on another part of his anatomy.

"The King and Cha are not just beautiful, they are skilled at seduction," he explained. "Anyone who spent a night with them after drinking that potion would naturally give them their hearts."

They had mistaken the overpowering lust for love.

So the Cha royals had bravely come to Estia with their potion, but failed miserably.

"Love potion..."

Jennie understood perfectly. So they were the ones to blame for the cruel difficulties she had endured.

Liam had wanted to wait until the situation was resolved to tell her, so she would not worry. He had known that an issue of love potions might resurrect some of the most terrible memories from her past.

Fury suddenly erupted. She couldn't believe anyone would try to take Liam away from her with such low, despicable manipulation. It was unforgivable.

"I would like to slap them both," she said.

Liam frowned, looking guilty again.

"I have to tell you..." He confessed. "I killed them."

Of course Liam would have taken care of them properly. And they would have suffered a lot more pain than a few slaps. Jennie just

nodded.

The warm water made her feel sleepy, and her eyes began to drift closed as Liam bathed beside her. His voice sounded faint and far away.

"I have another gift for you," he went on. "We turned the capital upside down, investigating the potion...and we found your counterfeiters, by chance."

His large hand lightly touched Jennie's cheek.

"What should we do with them?" He asked. "Shall we behead them? It would be appropriate to hang them in the market square..."

Jennie mumbled a reply, and abruptly fell asleep.

It was a deep sleep, and comfortable.

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# Finale

## Last Chapter

Jennie was sick for several days afterward. Liam, repentant for his many misdeeds, stayed by her side to look after her.

So instead of the weakened Jennie, it was Mura that scolded Liam for three days. The other Kurkans were firmly on Jennie's side too, and made sure he was aware of their displeasure.

That made Jennie feel a bit better.

When she finally came back to her senses, having rested in bed for several days, everything had already been settled.

The decapitated King and Queen if Cha were hung high over the gates of their own palace. Mura had explained the details of their deaths to Jennie, to make it clear they had been condemned based on the nature of their crimes. Nancy's death had been fairly clean, but Eunwoo's had taken a long time, and been very painful.

The Kurkans were angrier with the one who had endangered Jennie than the one who tried—and failed—to endanger Liam.

Additionally, the coin counterfeiters that had worried her had been publicly executed in the capital square. Their heads were displayed for several days.

Thus, Jennie's life returned to normal.

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She told Morga about Leo's dream, asking whether it was actual precognition or just a coincidence.

Morga was stunned when he heard her story. He was much more enthusiastic than Jennie had expected.

"The prince has the talent to become a sorcerer...!"

According to his rather excited explanation, Kurkan sorcerers might be born with several talents. The ability to foresee the future was the most prized talent a sorcerer could have. Though Morga could glimpse the future with astrology, he could only do so with the aid of additional spells.

"To be born with the gift of prophecy..." He breathed. "It's extraordinary."

Morga studied Leo in detail, explaining to the little boy that he was the first sorcerer Morga had met in his lifetime born with the gift of prophecy. Leo only smiled. Momo was funny.

"We don't know how strong your gift is yet," Morga went on. "But it will surely be great. You are the son of Liam's blood. Once you learn languages properly, I will begin teaching you sorcery."

Jennie, awed by her son's unexpected talents, left in a state of confusion.

"Mama..."

She had agreed to have tea with Liam in the garden, and as they walked to the place, Leo waved his hand, frowning.

"Mama! Hand!"

"I'm sorry, Mama was thinking of other things."

"Uh..." Leo snorted, unimpressed. He only relented when Jennie promised not to forget again.

Continuing on, they walked hand-in-hand until the energetic little boy turned and shouted.

"Mama!" And then, very clearly, "I'm your big brother."

Jennie cocked her head at the strange comment. For a moment, she thought Leo was just playing make-believe, but he pointed at her belly.

"I want to meet you soon," he said innocently.

Jennie's lips parted silently. A wild thought had occurred to her, but then Liam's voice distracted her.

"Leo," he said, appearing ahead.

"Father!"

Instantly, Leo lunged toward him, and Jennie followed slowly, pondering what Leo had said. Liam might already know too, and would pretend he didn't.

Before she realized it, Liam approached beside her, with Leo in his arms still saying, *I'm the big brother, I'm the big brother!* Jennie's lips parted while she was still lost in thought.

"Liam."

"Tell me, Jennie."

"Are we going to Kurkan? To show Leo the desert."

Liam had often visited Kurkan during his military campaigns, but Jennie had not been able to go. She had promised Leo they would go to the desert when he was big enough, and now it seemed the time had come. Not only had Jennie's body recovered, but Leo was old enough to travel.

"What do you think?" Liam asked Leo, lifting him onto his shoulders. The boy answered Jennie's question instead of his father's.

"An avventure! Let's go on an avventure!"

Jennie had read him a storybook about fishing in the sea. Leo was still filled with the idea of adventure.

"There's lots of fishes in the ocean," he began, though he didn't just want to fish. Leo began listing off all the adventures he had learned about. Picking fruit in the mountains, picking flowers in the fields, fetching water from the river, then spending the night at an inn in a small town...

Liam smiled as his son chattered on endlessly.

"Leo has always lived in a palace," he noted. "I think he needs to see the world."

"Yes." Jennie smiled back at him. And her eyes went to the sky behind them both, where the clouds had cleared, and the formally gray sky had turned as blue as the sea.

Her dazzling purple eyes went to her husband. Her son, sitting on his shoulders, the two of them so bright in the sunlight, it was as if they were shining themselves.

Not so long ago, she had wanted to die. She had decided to take her own life, and her heart was like a fortress of iron. But now that despair had vanished, and all the darkness that had shrouded her was gone.

"Where does my wife want to go?" Liam asked, joking.

But Jennie answered seriously, thinking of the warm golden light that had driven away all the darkness.

"Anywhere," she said quietly. "As long as it's with you."

It really didn't matter. Deep into the mountains, to remote islands, on the other side of vast oceans, even through endless deserts. No matter where it was, she would love every moment, as long as she was at this man's side.

No. Now it was the three of them.

Jennie smiled slightly as she laid a hand on her belly.

Maybe even four.

The sunlight was soft, and felt so good.

**THE END**

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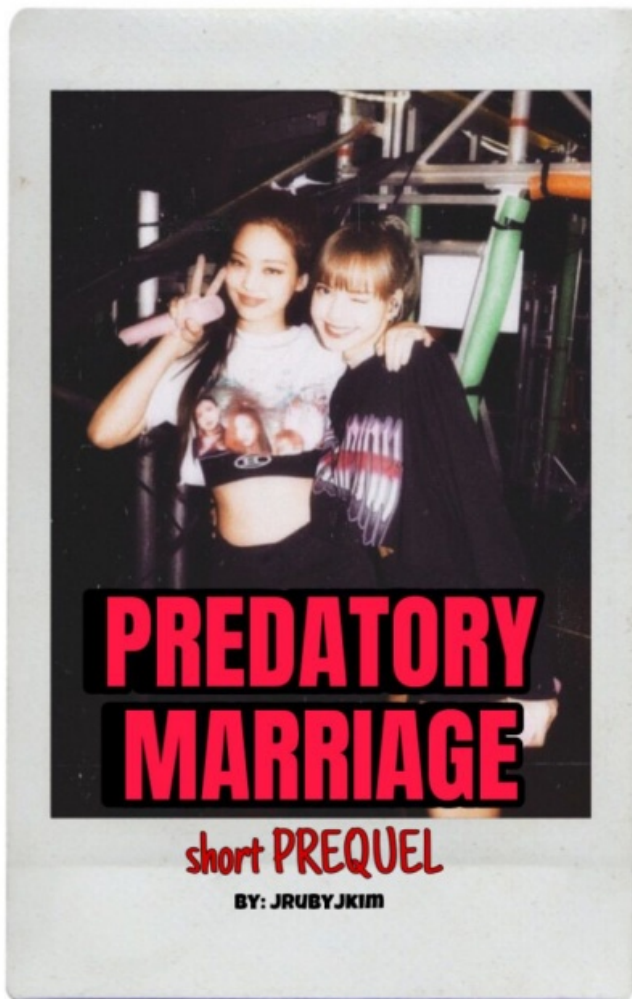
*thank you vv much for reading this adaptation, i appreciate every each of you for taking time and patiently waiting for the updates! :))*

*i will publish the prequel later so stay tuned! ;)*

*- pc*

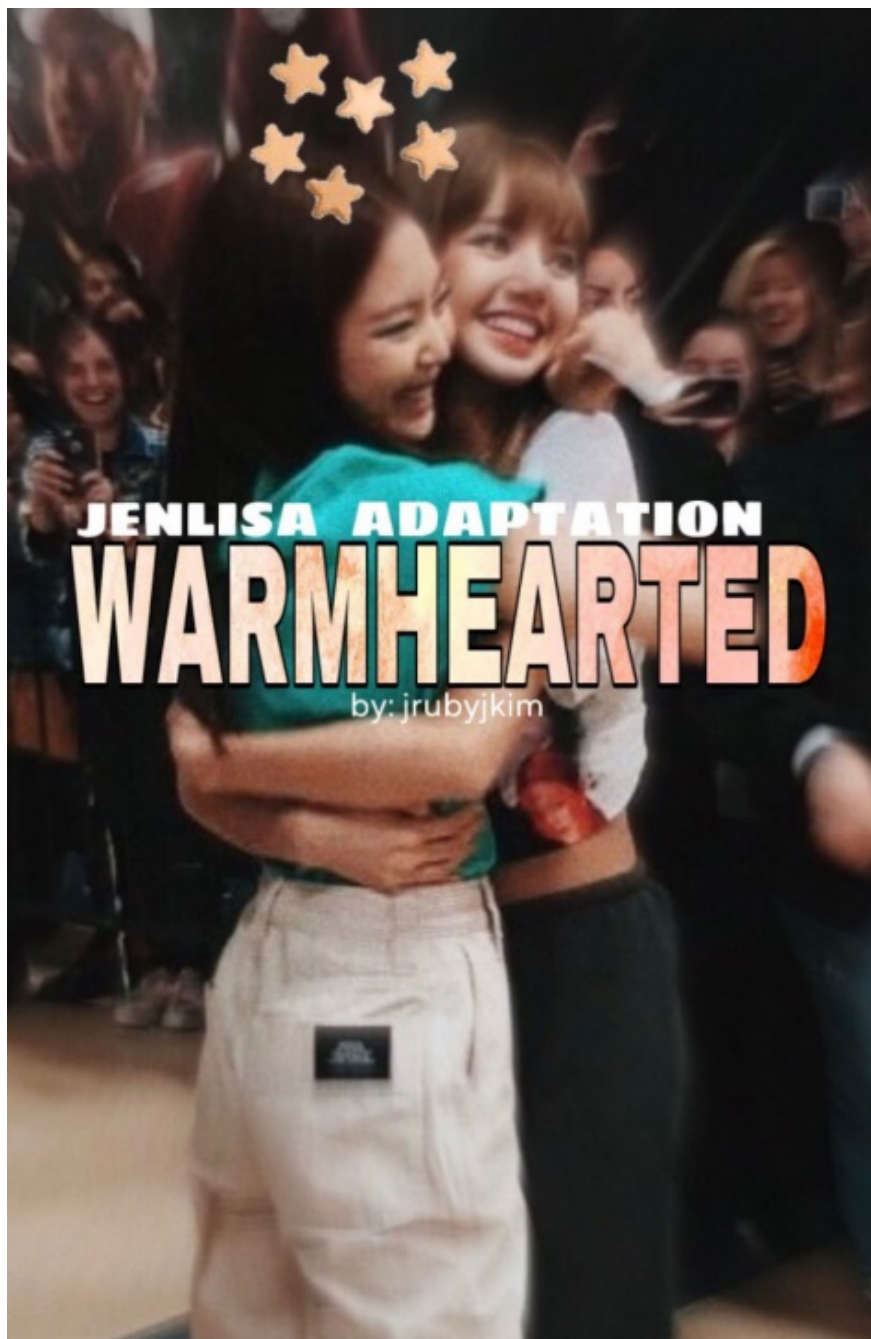
short Prequel + new adaptation !

It's out!!



To all readers who want to know Liam's past and how he met Jennie when they're kids, this book is for you! I will finish this short adaptation asap so make sure too tune in on my updates. I also vv much appreciate if each one of you will leave a comment on each chapter. :)))

+ new adaptation ^^



you can check the book on my profile or reading list <3



+ + new converted story

## **Jennie And The Beast**

*A dark version of Beauty and the Beast*

You can find it on my profile !